

Interim Management: Long-Term Value from a Short-Term Placement

By Jason Bisesi

Nearly every professional in every industry can likely relate to covering for a colleague who has been out sick or on leave for a long period of time, or gaining additional responsibilities for someone who's left the organization completely. For large organizations as a whole, this scenario may not seem like a problem, but for the smaller teams within them, this can be a significant stressor. Now, consider the implications of a sub-specialty inside the confines of a hospital, with the vacant position being the leader of that team...

Corazon has oftentimes found that Manager, Director, or Administrator-level positions in healthcare facilities can become vacant unexpectedly, but are nearly never filled quickly enough to avoid lasting, damaging effects on day-to-day operations, team morale, patient satisfaction, and supply/inventory management. Oversight for all of these singular responsibilities is very important for a quality leader, and to be most effective, should reside with one person. To assign these responsibilities to multiple team members will no doubt result in inconsistencies, which can be very costly – clinically, operationally, and financially – for any size hospital.

In the event that a team leader, especially one in a high-volume area, is no longer present at the facility and there is no clear replacement readily available, hospital executives typically turn to their in-house recruitment teams to secure a new hire. Sometimes a search such as this one can last anywhere from three months to up to a full year due to the difficulty of finding, vetting, and then hiring a qualified candidate, which are in short supply in nearly every area of the country. The negative programmatic impact of such a lengthy search can affect all aspects of service line operations.

There is an alternative to letting this position sit vacant for such a long period of time, however: a qualified Interim leader. Corazon believes that placing a polished, highly-experienced individual in a vacant position while searching for a permanent hire can “bridge the gap” by maintaining team focus and direction, infusing new ideas from past experiences, and ensuring consistency in operations...which ensures quality patient care continues without interruption – a significant area of concern for a very complex and/or high-volume area of the hospital.

An Interim Management Case Study:

After placement in a high-volume cath lab at a large healthcare facility in the northeast, a Corazon interim manager was able to accomplish the following while the search for a permanent hire was conducted:

- Identified \$26,000 in missing charges during inspection of first two interventional cases
- Saved the organization over \$300,000 on product costs, based on an assessment of the first 200 cases
- Updated the ChargeMaster to be aligned with other organizations in the same market, resulting in a 40% increase to gross revenue
- Kept executive management apprised of key operational strategic issues across the Cardiovascular Service Line, with a strategic focus inside the Cardiac Cath Lab area
- Refined the existing Quality Management Process, policies and procedures, and systematic flow of Cardiac Cath Lab and corresponding areas to improve patient outcomes and satisfaction

As seen in this example, the Cardiac Cath Lab and other areas of the Cardiovascular Service Line involve a very specific set of responsibilities that multiple team members could not adequately manage. The emergent type of procedures being conducted within this particular service area rely on many individuals operating as a team to ensure patients are receiving the best care...and a leader is required for best practice performance. The experienced interim in this case was able to quickly step-in and improve the program in a short time; all while avoiding the potential issues that could have emerged while the search process was underway.

An often overlooked aspect of utilizing an interim assignee in a leadership role is their wealth of experience and expertise in a focused area. Taking advantage of their successes and failures over the course of an entire career can be an invaluable resource to a program. Corazon's experience supports that most interim placements are eager to pass along their knowledge, which can elevate the existing team and propel the program forward well beyond their time onsite.

The mentorship aspect of an interim cannot be understated – while charged with day-to-day strategic and tactical responsibilities of the role, their value can extend beyond, positively impacting the program well into the future based on the changes made.

In many cases, a gap in leadership can unfortunately create turmoil in relationships between physicians and staff. By bringing in an experienced interim leader, the hospital provides physicians with a clear point person to work with their contingent and continue to push the service forward to new heights. On some occasions, the interim leader, staff, and physicians meld so well that the interim ends up joining the hospital in a full-time capacity.

Hospital administrators often cite the increased cost of travel expenses and per diem rates as a hindrance in bringing on an interim leader, but this can be a shortsighted view. As highlighted in the Case Study, the interim's skillset can more than make up for increased cost through a direct increase in revenue and/or a significant reduction in hospital expenses. This is not including the hidden long-term value of team-building, experience from similar markets, or a new perspective for ongoing program challenges.

Each program inside a hospital can vary in terms of particular challenges and needs, just as every hospital does as a whole. However, there is one constant in nearly all thriving organizations, and that is sound and competent leadership. If a leader exits a key service line, the lasting impact of a vacancy (even one of just a few weeks) can negatively impact everything that has already been built ... Don't let a gap affect a successful service line's present OR future – consider a qualified interim to bridge the gap and reap the lasting benefits he or she can bring.



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