

White Paper: Medical Director “On Demand”

Historically, many organizations maintained their own in-house medical departments or, at least, a medical director. Following recent business trends to eliminate non-core functions, many organizations have turned over the duties previously held by an in-house medical director to the “human resources” component of management. While this may be good for cutting head count and overhead, the result is that these organizations have lost critical capabilities.

Health-related issues are not what hard-charging, operations-oriented executives want to think about – for themselves or their organization. “Health” is just assumed to be there – until it isn’t. However, studies show that active management of health and medical issues, as well as inclusion of health and medical considerations in larger management decision-making, can improve the bottom line both directly and indirectly. These improved results are achieved through increased productivity, avoidance or mitigation of lost time events, reduction of risk exposure, and an understanding of how various medical issues can affect operations.

Most organizations are familiar with standard occupational health and medicine functions, such as Job Task Analyses, Industrial Hygiene and Safety, Workers Compensation program management, and Employee Assistance Programs. These programs are typically driven by laws and regulations. Although they are critically important, they are usually viewed only as cost centers, without recognition of how a well-integrated health and medical program, tailored to the needs of the operation, can add revenue, not overhead.

At Inova, we have extensive experience in the standard occupational health fields and serve organizations of all sizes, both regionally and nationally. But our expertise goes even deeper than these standard areas. We have the ability to provide employers with a “Medical Director on Demand,” which can help address a wider range of health-related issues with significant impact on risks, opportunities, operations, and most importantly, the bottom line. This gives organizations of any size the benefits of having an in-house medical department without the head-count and expense.

The following pages provide details on the health-related areas that many organizations need to address, demonstrating the benefits of a Medical Director on Demand:

Health Services Reviews: Health and medical expenses represent a significant proportion of any organization's expenses. An Inova Medical Director on Demand can serve as an important semi-independent member of an organization's review and planning function, providing insights on new developments and best-practices in organizational health issues. Additionally, a Medical Director on Demand can provide critical insights on specific health services, especially for self-insured organizations; as well as assist in analysis of claim/event trends and assist managers in developing optimal future approaches.

Medical aspects of critical incident planning: The next SARS, pandemic-flu, Ebola, or terrorism incident (such as the 2001 anthrax attacks) is always just around the corner. An Inova Medical Director on Demand can capitalize on experience gained through critical incident planning work to serve as a key team member of an organization's event preparedness or management team. The Medical Director on Demand can tailor a plan in advance of need (the ideal) or in the early stages of an emerging event. Our team is highly experienced in the all of medical aspects of Prepare, Prevent, Protect, Respond, and Recover.

Facility and Operations Planning: Incorporating industrial hygiene and safety principles in facilities planning and operations management is among the most cost-effective ways to ensure safety and productivity for years to come. Depending on the needs of the organization, specialists in multiple disciplines can be brought in as needed, including expertise such as sleep medicine and ergonomics. This can nip issues in the bud and help avoid costly future health services expenses. Rationally applied principles can help reduce risk and increase employee productivity, thus adding to bottom line. An Inova Medical Director on Demand serving as the organization's advisor/advocate in this process can help ensure these principles are applied reasonably and cost-effectively.

Event Planning and Coverage: Most organizations sponsor events, ranging from company picnics to board meetings at a remote exotic location. Medical coverage and medical risk management are often overlooked during the planning of events. An Inova Medical Director on Demand can work with planning teams to ensure that appropriate preparation and medical coverage planning is incorporated. The plans could be as simple as having a first-aid kit onsite and a way to call 911, or as complex as having a fully equipped emergency medical response team and hip-pocket medical evacuation plan ready to go.

Travel Medicine and Medical Evacuation Management: Any organization can purchase travel health insurance to reduce risk exposure for international travelers. However, most operations managers or human resources teams do not fully understand the various types of available coverage and preventive services. By using an Inova Medical Director on Demand who is experienced in management of international health issues, organizations will have an advocate to ensure employees are getting the best possible protection. And they get the assurance that if a medical event does happen, the employee's well-being and the organization's checkbook are not handled at the whim of the international provider.

Wellness Services: Studies increasingly show that organizations that sponsor employee wellness programs see a reduction in overall health costs. Through internally managed programs as well as outsourced wellness services such as Inova HealthSource, organizations can institute these programs in a manner coordinated with all other provider and insurance carrier programs. With wide-ranging programs including fitness/well-being classes, smoking cessation, AED/CPR/first aid, case management, and personal development classes/coaching, a wellness program coordinated with the assistance an Inova Medical Director on Demand can have significant positive impacts on employee productivity, morale, and overall health costs.

Worksite Primary Care: While not appropriate for all employers, there are many situations where onsite primary care for the organization can result in significant direct and indirect resource savings. For self-insured organizations, this onsite care is provided with minimum disruption to an employee's workday. And, the cost of care is paid directly by the organization, thereby removing the significant overhead costs applied by an insurance plan manager. Additionally, these onsite services are typically provided without a deductible or co-pay, making this a major work-place enhancement for employees – at little or no additional cost to the employer over what they would have been responsible for in a typical self-insurance model. An Inova Medical Director on Demand can ensure that these programs receive the appropriate oversight so that they are cost effective and net risk-reducers.

Integrated Executive Medicine Services: The value to leadership of having a known and trusted physician “on speed dial” can be immense. Often, the Inova Medical Director on Demand can answer leadership personal medical questions, assist with appointments, or even directly address minor issues, saving a lost half-day getting to a primary care provider. In addition, through partnership with the Inova 360 program, an organization can have facilitated access to one of the region's most respected executive physical and comprehensive concierge care programs.

Enhanced Occupational Health Programs: Many organizations look at occupational health programs as cost-centers. A well-designed, integrated comprehensive program, however, can turn these cost centers into cost avoidance and risk reduction programs through the addition of active return-to-work programs, disability mitigation programs, alternative work strategies, and active illness/injury response programs, including, in some cases, onsite direct care services. Additionally, an experienced occupational health professional can often serve as a strong member of a joint labor/management team as they can show all team members how well-structured health, safety, and wellness programs can benefit both workers and the bottom-line.

The final area is often the most important of all:

On Demand Medical Director “One Call:” The next time a major medical issue hits the news, or a specific health-related issue comes up within the organization, leadership needs a trusted source of accurate medical information. The news tends to sensationalize any medical issue because they know the general population will pay attention to anything that is perceived as being a direct health threat. Employees or employee organizations can also sometimes maximize possible health threats as they recognize that those can be difficult areas for management to handle. Having a trusted physician, experienced in the interface of operations and health, that leadership can call at any time and from whom they can rapidly receive a detailed analysis of the reality of the issue, can be invaluable. Issues ranging from flu outbreaks, to food adulteration threats, to staff members potentially (or actually) exposed to threats such exotic infectious organisms or toxins can be terrifying to leaders and employees alike. Having an Inova Medical Director on Demand immediately available can generate the accurate information that serves as an immunization against panic or simple over-reaction.

Summary:

This catalog of health-related issues, typically formerly handled by an organization’s Medical Director or Chief Medical Officer, are often not recognized by operations managers or human resource managers or recognized only when an issue arises – when addressing the issue becomes much more complex and expensive. The Inova team has extensive experience in advising organizations of all sizes, both regionally and nationally, on these key issues. Often, these issues are best approached using a retainer/task-order model that assigns a key health professional to the organization to develop bidirectional familiarity and trust, while allowing the organization to avoid the fixed overhead of a permanent staff member. Importantly, except in organizations large enough to build an entire health and medical department, it is rare to find the expertise needed for all of these areas in one or two people. Using this retainer model, the assigned lead serves as the “one-stop-shop” for leadership, while having the ability to reach into the extensive experience base embedded in Inova. This gives organizations of any size the benefits of having an in-house medical department without the head-count and expense.

For further information on how the Inova Health System can assist your organization in reducing risk, enhancing productivity, and increasing bottom-line, contact Jeff Carr at [571-472-0159](tel:571-472-0159) or Jeffrey.carr@inova.org

Author: William Lang, MD, MHA. Dr. Lang, Inova’s Medical Director for International Medicine, has over 20 years of experience in organizational health management including service as Deputy Director/COO, then Director of the White House Medical Unit (1996-2007) and Deputy Physician to the President of the United States. Subsequently, Dr. Lang was Associate Chief Medical Officer of the US Department of Homeland Security responsible for coordination of all health services by, for, or on behalf of the Department.