

# Introducing teamwork in physician groups: A case study

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**I**ncreasing complexity and rapid change now characterize the health care system. More specifically, there is increasing pressure on providers to focus on quality outcomes, while at the same time accepting limits on payment. Accordingly, organizations are thinking of ways of restructuring their organizations to increase productivity and performance. Thus many of these organizations are abandoning traditional bureaucratic systems in favor of working within teams.

The medical practice is not immune to this trend (Bender et al 1990). However, the traditional form of medical practice organization and its impact on communication and decision making are not compatible with the teamwork concept. Yet there are no reports of medical practices making a commitment to team building as a basis for improving the quality and performance of a practice despite the fact that it is increasingly apparent that there is a need for improving the quality of communication among physicians within a practice and

incorporating teamwork as part of the style of the practice (Bender et al, 1990).

In this report we present a case study of a team-building intervention with a distressed group practice of primary care physicians. The goal was to help the physicians move away from parallel individual practices within in a group to a team group practice organization.

## **The problem**

The practice was formed six years ago when three solo physicians chose to develop a single group practice. This was done to provide coverage, to ease the pressures of being in a solo practice and to share expenses and overheads. For two years the practice changed only in that the three physicians were in a single office. The original staff, nurses and receptionists continued to



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