

A collage of images on the left side of the page. It includes a man and a woman in business attire looking at a document, a 3D bar chart with orange and blue bars, a pie chart with blue and orange segments, a man in a lab coat standing next to a medical scan machine, and a bar chart with labels "9.90%" and "12.1".

When Do You Need an Outside Expert? What is Your Organization's Tipping Point?

*Integrated Oncology Consulting Solutions
And Cancer Care Center Planning*

When Do You Need an Outside Expert?

What is Your Organization's Tipping Point?

By Steven L. Black, MBA

According to Merriam-Webster.com the definition of *tipping point* is the critical point in a situation, process or system beyond which a significant and often unstoppable effect or change takes place.

Many successful organizations structure their business environment where internal staff and resources manage daily operations and develop strategic plans for the future without utilizing external expertise. However, there are situations when the cumulative effect of different variables creates a tipping point in the analysis of whether to use an outside expert specializing in strategic planning and innovative solutions to be most successful.

The Variables

Team Members' Expertise

How strong is your bench? Project management or planning is sometimes a separate department within an organization. Can the people responsible for daily operations also be responsible for leading the process of developing a long-term strategy? Do they have the bandwidth to fully develop a strategic plan in a condensed period of time? What is their elasticity? How far can you stretch resources before something snaps? There are companies that specialize in either long-term project management (such as a building project) or facilitating in the development of a strategic plan, so that administrative staff can focus on the daily operations of the cancer center and provide the best possible care for patients and their caregivers.

Scope or Size of the Project

If an organization wants to invest millions of dollars in their cancer program for buildings, people or technology, they often decide to minimize the risk by bringing in outside experts who have the experience of developing and managing multi-million dollar projects. This is not a situation where you want someone learning on the job. Whether it is the renovation of existing space or a new building, there are many tasks which must be managed in order for a project to be successful so that the program starts treating patients on the date announced to the public. External resources can serve as a partner and sounding board for the development of plans that may ultimately need to be presented to the Hospital Board for approval and funding.

Analytical Expertise

It is easy to find public data about cancer by doing a Google search, but understanding the nuances of what the data means for your program and the future is a much more difficult task. Companies that specialize in strategic planning and the development of pro forma and population projections develop insights into data trends by virtue of the amount of data that they analyze and their knowledge of the trends. The development of and access to proprietary information and databases that provide information about successful programs help to create benchmarks that define the best programs both from a clinical and economic perspective.

Changes in regulations occur almost daily. It may be difficult to stay abreast of the ever-changing reimbursement climate, the latest changes from the Office of Inspector General (OIG) or Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). Outside firms can do this task for you and alert you to changes or audit your program for compliance to assure appropriate reimbursement with the required documentation based on the services provided.

National “Best Practices”

There is not a “one size fits all” solution for developing a successful cancer program. Developing a strategic plan for your cancer program requires looking at multiple components including the demographics of your market, your competition, the resources available to build the program, the expertise of physicians, clinical and administrative staff and many other elements to assess the current state of the program and determine if there is a gap between the program and what is considered best practice. “Value-based” and “quality” are two buzzwords that we constantly see in industry publications and the mainstream media when we talk about the future of healthcare. Everyone wants to be able to deliver the best care possible at the lowest cost and the quickest way to achieve these goals is to adopt procedures and practices that have already been tested and proven at organizations across the country. There are companies that span the continuum from designing the most efficient staff mix to how to develop pathways to standardize the care delivery process based on evidence-based research.

Unbiased Perspective: How to Avoid the “Oncopolitics”

Whether you have a 25 bed critical access hospital or a 500 bed regional tertiary hospital, every organization has politics. In cancer programs, we sometimes refer to this situation as “oncopolitics”. Do you have a program where the senior medical oncologist has the title of “Director”, but one of the other physicians is actually running the show? Is there a surgeon that is considered the rainmaker for the hospital and administration always defers to whatever that person wants or demands? Is there a wealthy supporter in the community that has decided that the community needs cutting-edge technology that was recently featured on a national news program? All of these scenarios are examples of “oncopolitics”. The cancer program administrator or the hospital administration typically does not want to force a confrontation with any of these stakeholders. This is an excellent time to have an unbiased expert assess the program and work with administration and the clinical team to develop and present a proposal that acknowledges all of the stakeholders and that everyone is comfortable supporting.

The Tipping Point

Whenever an organization is faced with trying to solve a problem with multiple variables, it becomes a multi-factorial dilemma. Most organizations can handle problems with limited variables, but once it is determined that the project involves several of the issues/elements noted above, that is when the organization hits the tipping point and should consider utilizing an outside expert. To learn more about the expertise of The Oncology Group and our outstanding team of consultants, please contact Steve Black, Vice President of The Oncology Group, at 512.583.8815 or by email at info@theoncologygroup.com.