

Using Champions and Opinion Leaders to Support Learning, Evidence-Based Practice, and Quality Improvement



EvidenceNOW
Advancing Heart Health in Primary Care

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Successful practice change efforts require both strong senior leadership and collective and distributed leadership throughout the practice. Leaders should recruit individuals to serve as evidence champions from all parts of the practice – including physicians and other clinicians, practice managers, and front and back office staff. Practices want champions who are not just focused on implementing a particular piece of evidence, but who share a vision and provide ongoing support for evidence-based practice.

Where to Find Champions?

Potential champions include:

- Team leaders who will be using evidence in the provision of care
- Opinion leaders, individuals who are respected and influential among their peer group
- Staff who are passionate about evidence-based practice and quality improvement
- Staff who occupy key roles (e.g., medical director, chief financial officer)

If natural champions are scarce, leaders can cultivate champions through training, mentoring, appropriate rewards for improvement, and helping practice staff engage in self-reflection about the unique contributions they can make and leadership skills they would like to develop.

Champion Skills and Roles

Practice leaders should also consider whether potential champions have the skills to be effective. Most champions do not have all these skills early in their journey, but these skills can be cultivated. Look for champions who can:

- Generate support for the changes that need to be made
- Encourage, coach, remind, and mentor
- Bridge communication gaps
- Foster collaboration
- Overcome resistance to change
- Problem-solve
- Mobilize resources

Practice leaders should consider how to help champions be effective:

- Will champions have an official role in the implementation of evidence?
- Can champions be released from other duties to work on implementation?
- How will practice leaders demonstrate support for champions publicly?

Adapted from: Brach C, Lenfestey N., Roussel A, et al. *Will It Work Here? A Decisionmaker's Guide to Adopting Innovations*. Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, September 2008.

