

SCPMG University: Helping New Physicians Adapt and Succeed

Jeffrey Weisz, MD
Nancy H Spiegel, MS

In July 2007, the Southern California Permanente Medical Group (SCPMG) launched SCPMG University, a program designed to help newly hired physicians adapt to their positions more quickly and lay the foundation for a successful career within the medical group.

An individual's first few months with an organization are crucial. During that period, professionals develop a sense of what is important, what the organization expects from them, and what they can expect in return. A study conducted by Texas Instruments showed that new employees who attend an *onboarding* program reach full productivity two months earlier than those who do not attend.¹ Many companies have developed robust onboarding programs for new employees with an eye toward improving both productivity and employee retention.^{2,3}

Building a Solid Foundation

SCPMG University consists of three all-day sessions at SCPMG's regional headquarters in Pasadena, California and covers a comprehensive curriculum (Table 1).

Within three months of their hire date, incoming Associate Physicians generally attend SCPMG University, giving them an early introduction to the tools they will need to succeed in the organization. The rigor of the

program contrasts sharply with the informal approach some long-time SCPMG partners may remember.

"My only orientation was coming in to meet my new chief and finding out my schedule. He gave me a few videos, sent me over to another building to watch them on my own, and told me to come back to start work the next day," said Marc Klau, MD, Regional Director, Physician Education, Residency, and Leadership.

"It took a long time for me to really understand the organization—I don't think I really figured out the finances or our quality improvement initiatives for five to seven years," he said. "Now, we're making sure our associates get all of that information right up front, in just a few days."

Focusing on Inspiration and Engagement, Not Forms

Another unique aspect of the program is that it casts aside the traditional paper-heavy orientation, drawing instead on multimedia resources and interactive activities to create a more emotional, engaging experience. Examples include:

- powerful video materials, ranging from a documentary-style film about physicians rediscovering

Day 1: What is Kaiser Permanente? Past, present, and future	Day 2: Permanente Medicine: How we deliver care	Day 3: How we support you
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History, mission, values, and our unique structure • Community benefit • Business and finance 101 • How you influence our brand • Meet the Executive Medical Director 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinical quality • Care experience (service)/access • Q & A with mentor panel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tools for physicians (physician portal, continuing medical education, and clinical library) • Understanding and avoiding professional liability • Benefits • Thriving as a physician: body, mind, and soul



Jeffrey Weisz, MD, (left) is the Executive Medical Director of the Southern California Permanente Medical Group. E-mail: jeffrey.a.weisz@kp.org.
Nancy H Spiegel, MS, (right) is the Manager of Leadership and Organization Development for the Southern California Permanente Medical Group. E-mail: nancy.h.spiegel@kp.org.

Table 2. Items showing greatest improvements on pre- and postprogram surveys

Item	Percentage favorable (preprogram)	Percentage favorable (postprogram)	Mean (pre)	Mean (post)
"I am familiar with the principles of Kaiser Permanente's Labor Management Partnership (LMP)"	29	80	3.03 ^a	4.15**
"I know where I can find information about key Kaiser Permanente initiatives, metrics and goals"	48	88	3.38 ^a	4.30**
"I know SCPMG's Clinical Strategic Goals (CSGs)"	50	94	3.50 ^a	4.38**
"I know SCPMG's Access goals"	52	93	3.50 ^a	4.38**

^a Mean scores are significantly different at $p < 0.001$
 SCPMG = Southern California Permanente Medical Group

meaning in medicine to some of the most popular television ads from Kaiser Permanente's (KP's) Thrive campaign

- a reading from an emotional thank-you letter from a patient who has been a member of KP for more than 50 years
- an exercise in which participants build a paper avatar representing who they are and then talk about it with their neighbors as a way of breaking the ice; and
- short skits by SCPMG's dedicated acting troupe (the Care Actors), who recreate common office scenarios and encourage audience members to view the situation from the patients' points of view.

Structured exercises also encourage interaction. Physicians are asked to work together as a group, for example, to evaluate the care needs of our patient population and make recommendations for specific quality improvement goals. Significant time is also set aside for physicians to ask questions of regional leaders and get advice from long-time partners.

"Physicians are presented with an unparalleled opportunity to ask questions and build professional relationships, instilling a sense of pride and belonging to the SCPMG family," said Lucia Soh, Director of Physician Leadership and Performance, who manages the day-to-day operations of SCPMG University.

Even the seating is arranged with careful thought. Physicians sit with colleagues from their medical center on the first day, but join physicians from the same specialty on the remaining two days. This encourages physicians to get to know colleagues they might not have otherwise met, helping them build a broad network that they can tap into once they are back in their own practice.

Evaluating the Program's Benefits

Because the program is only a year old, it is still too early to say how it will impact retention and productivity. A proposed three-year evaluation plan, which incorporates a multimodal methodology, will help us ascertain the immediate and long-term effect of the program on performance and business outcomes.

Survey data gathered from participants in SCPMG University's first year show promising improvements in organizational knowledge. Mean scores improved significantly on 11 out of 14 items on pre- and post-program surveys (Table 2).

We believe SCPMG University will prove to be a valuable resource for our medical group. In the future, we may introduce additional programs, including one to help physicians new to leadership positions become strong leaders in SCPMG. Offering opportunities such as these will help us attract and retain talented physicians, improve our performance as a medical group, and let our physicians know they are valued members of the Permanente family. ❖

Disclosure Statement

The author(s) have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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