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Planning Perfection

Facility Activation = coordinated approach to occupying a new healthcare facility

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Moving into a new or renovated space is the most highly anticipated part of bringing a new project on line. Even a tiny oversight can have a huge impact, causing delays that can result in significant lost revenue.

And yet two services are often overlooked when bringing a new project to completion: transition planning and move management.

Transition planning answers the “why and the how” questions related to the use of the new space, while move management is critical to answering the “what and when.” Together, they are referred to as Facility Activation.

CONTEXT + VALUE

With the significant capital investment healthcare organizations are making in new facilities, there is understandably a strong desire to generate a rapid return on that investment. While the price tag of a new facility seems high, the cost of staffing a facility over time is higher still. Developing a Facility Activation Plan can save money for years because it ensures that old habits are not transferred to new spaces.

A Facility Activation Plan humanizes efficiency by translating an organization’s strategic goals into concepts that front line staff can comprehend, so they can understand how to contribute to the organization’s success.

CHALLENGES

A Facility Activation Plan can help the healthcare organization manage the challenges posed by moving into a new facility. Moving care providers from older facilities to a new facility can be a culture shock to staff. With the help of an experienced transition planner, the team can map its current state or existing environment, identify bottlenecks, and then review the future state to help staff understand how to deliver care in the new environment. Remember that new protocols impact more than just care givers. Most new healthcare facilities require an army of specialists, technicians and outside vendors to keep things running at peak performance. Food service, physical plant, security, equipment providers must all be trained to support the front line staff. A transition planner helps identify the critical groups and provide a training plan.

SOLUTIONS

From single departmental moves to replacement hospitals, successfully transitioning to a new care setting is the result of a focused Facility Activation Plan. Below are some best practice recommendations when planning a move into a new facility.

Early Planning

Healthcare leaders should start developing their Facility Activation Plan 12-18 months before the first patient day. In the past five to seven years many healthcare organizations had not been able to dedicate an employee to manage the planning and move into a new facility. With so many elements to a move, it is paramount that an external expert be brought in.

Role + Environment

Everyone in the organization needs to understand their roles in the new facility. During orientation they should be able to experience the patient’s entire journey, from arrival in the parking lot to the reception desk, and through the hallways the patient will travel. This virtual walk-through helps the staff to see the building through the patient’s eyes.

Leading vs Monitoring

The transition planner must lead and not simply monitor the facility activation process. To be proactive, planners must ask the tough questions to identify the risks that the organization needs to be aware of. Think of the planner as a dedicated resource paying attention to all the details that may be overlooked by hospital staff who already have full time jobs managing the hospital or providing patient care. New facilities are designed to be more efficient, and this may entail reassignment of staff or even staff reduction. A transition planner can help navigate this stressful adjustment.

Stakeholder Participation

Involve stakeholders from all departments early in the transition process. It is a financial fact of life that health systems need to accomplish more with the same or with even lower reimbursement amounts. To help stakeholders feel invested in the project, show them how the new facility aligns with their strategic, financial and operational goals.

Messaging + Continuity

Profitable healthcare systems communicate what a new building or renovated facility will mean to their organization. A Facility Activation Plan identifies the steps required to translate an organization's strategic goals to a larger and more diverse group of stakeholders. Transition planning teams amplify that message, not only to the people who will be working in the new facility but also to potential patients. The Facility Activation Plan provides the framework to involve key stakeholders and constituents and targets key milestone events to celebrate throughout the design and construction process. Community events, tours for staff, a "Doctors Only Night" are ways to make sure everyone has the opportunity to see the new facility before it opens. A transition planner should work with administration, physical plant, security, and marketing personnel to send out information to patients, families and the greater community, explaining how to approach the new facility, where to park and where to enter.

Training

A transition planner develops mock scenarios to allow staff to understand how to work in the new environment. Build current state versus future state exercises into the training. This provides an opportunity to test scenarios with mock patients and evaluate new workflow, operation plans, systems integration, staff training effectiveness and equipment functionality in the new spaces. Employees will be less apprehensive about the move if they are familiar with the new space before opening day. Depending on the scope of the project, training time will vary from two to four weeks.

Test Everything

Test all support systems as well as phones, televisions, electronic blinds, water and light sensors, elevators, and toilets. This can preclude embarrassing glitches. In one case a Facility Manager discovered that none of the new hospital beds were working. He had not attended training on these beds and did not realize that, after plugging them in, he still needed to press the On switch.



HBS provided a range of services, including Facility Activation and Medical Equipment Planning to bring the 450,000 SF, 150-bed Robert Brigham Healthplex expansion on line at Reading Hospital in Reading, PA. The expansion consolidated campus-wide procedural and surgical services supported by an eight-room procedural suite and a surgical center with 24 operating rooms including four hybrid rooms and two daVinci System robotic surgery rooms. HBS's transition planners helped prepare Reading clinical staff for their new work environment by creating workflow diagrams that helped them understand new protocols.

Photo Credit: Halkin | Mason Photography

The Human Element

What makes a hospital unique is its staff, not a new building or shiny new equipment. Healthcare is about people caring for people. So it is important for hospital leaders to understand the emotions of patients and staff when transitioning to a new facility. Nurses, central sterile techs, and other staff can understandably express emotion when the reality of the move sinks in. A new environment with an emphasis on efficiency means new equipment and expectations. Change can be frightening. For example, a new Central Sterile System can be very different from the old system that employees kept operating well past its useful life. Let them spend time exploring the new system, conduct dry runs so that they get to know the space and the equipment.

TOOLS

A Facility Activation Plan requires a robust set of tools to ensure a smooth implementation and transition. Reports should include an Executive Dashboard that summarizes activities in an easy to absorb format. The tools should be easy enough for anyone to use, rather than a complicated proprietary program that requires extensive staff training. The tools need should be able to display real time snapshots of activities and decisions for the next day, for the next week and for the coming month. The transition planner should be able to provide examples of the assessment tools, templates, checklists, work plans and “to/from” reports they use. If they are difficult to understand, it will make the monitoring the transition that much harder.



Penn Medicine's University Center at Presbyterian Medical Center at 3737 Market Street required a phased Facility Activation approach to accommodate the rolling construction schedule. Extensive transition planning was required to co-locate the Surgery Center as well as other critical service lines.

Photo Credit: Halkin | Mason Photography

CROSSING THE FINISH LINE

Completing a project and moving into a new facility provides an opportunity for ongoing improvement. It is important that the transition set the right tone for the future. As healthcare shifts to a value-based model, developing and implementing a Facility Activation Plan is a critical factor to achieving sustained efficiency long after Move Day. With today's constantly changing healthcare environment, there is no finish line.

Jay Hornung, ACHE is the Founder and President of Healthcare Building Solutions, Inc. (HBS). Following his 12-year tenure as Director of Design and Construction for one of the country's largest private hospital organizations, Jay Hornung established HBS. With offices in Philadelphia, Dallas, Orlando and Phoenix, HBS offers a range of services and solutions to facility managers, owners and developers in support of the built environment including Facility Activation, Transition Planning, Move Management, Medical Equipment Planning and Turn-Key Project Development services. He may be reached at jay.hornung@hbsinc.com.