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Fundraising in Ophthalmology

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Editorial

Ophthalmology reimbursement will almost certainly decrease with health care reform. Below are ten ideas I think will help us, as eye surgeons, navigate the shrinking reimbursement we may face in the future. Fund-raising is not the entire answer, but it is an important endeavour that will help ophthalmology if approached correctly.

Cultivate donors as part of a team

Fundraising is almost never an individual effort. This may include the dean and CEO of a medical school, or development officers in conjunction with MD's. It could be a spouse who has an important connection or a relative who is key in the relationship. What is important is that we recognize it is a team effort and not be exclusionary of those who could help.

Tailor giving to the donor and not the organization

Sometimes physicians can get focused on what they want for their organization and lose sight of what a donor may want. Focus on their desires and tailor their giving to the emotional connection they have. Sometimes philanthropists want to have a named gift opportunity, or give in real estate or, upon their death, donate their estate.

Development team is vital

Many organizations have development teams. These teams may be part of a campus, a medical school, a department or all of the above with varying degrees of interaction and organization. What is important is that development officers are treated with the utmost respect as they can only help you. If they are not included in your team approach, they may potentially hurt you.

Fundraise around a campaign

Philanthropists frequently want to give but don't know exactly what they are giving to. It is important to create a menu of opportunities. Examples include help building a new eye institute, helping develop a new service line, donations to a new research initiative, investment in a novel technology [1].

Any eye care professional can lead

It isn't just the leader of the eye group that who does the fundraising. Any member of the team can be the point person. Therefore, it is important to have grateful patients connect to specific service lines. Foster this service line approach and allow other physicians to lead.

Focus on a small group of donors

There may be 100 or more individuals who give to your organization. What may work best is to identify 3-10 donors who can garner the vast majority of your time as a fundraiser.

Create a VIP experience for donors

All patients get our best possible care regardless of their wealth. However, donors to your department should get special consideration outside of the medical care for their eyes. A concierge experience that engages them with the health care team can be beneficial to your fundraising success

Be a good steward of gifts both large and small

I once got a given from a fortune 500 individual and I put it in an account and saved it. Three months later, he asked me what I used it for. I told him I was saving it for something important thinking he would respect this strategy. Instead, I never got a gift from him again. Donors want you to spend what they give you and they want to see results of their philanthropy right away. Experienced givers are testing you with small gifts early in the relationship [2].

Focus on what works

Learn from past department chairman, from experienced philanthropists who shared stories, and visit hospitals all over the United States. Learn development and focus on what works. One of the things that work is learning from those more experienced. This, in addition to attending seminars and courses nationwide can contribute to fundraising success.

Approach existing organizations in the community

Lions clubs, Elks, the chamber of commerce, the United Way, and many local and national businesses and family foundations are present in most cities. It is a good idea to start with joining the Elks and Lions clubs in your city.

Fundraising is sort of like fishing. One person catches, another sets the hook, one reels in, and another gets the net out. You're not done though. You get it into the boat, clean it, cook it, and then eat it. There are a lot of steps and a lot of moving parts. It is a team effort and the team is diverse. Ophthalmology is going to need philanthropy more than ever before in our specialties history [1,3].

References

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