



Position: Chief Operating Officer

Position Description: A Chief Operating Officer oversees the day-to-day operations of a hospital or health system, ensuring that clinical, administrative, and operational functions are aligned with organizational strategy. The COO translates vision into execution, manages complex systems, and ensures operational excellence across departments – maintaining fiscal rigor, adherence to regulatory mandates, and accountability for quality, safety, and patient experience performance.

Ideal skill sets include systems thinking, financial acumen, communication, trust-building, adaptability, and the ability to lead across large, interdisciplinary teams.

Education, Licensure, Certifications, and Leadership Development

- Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (DO) degree (preferred)
- Board certification and unrestricted medical licensure (preferred)
- Optional but highly advantageous credentials:
 - MBA, MHA, or similar business/management degree
 - Formal leadership or executive development programs
 - [AOA Leadership Academy](#)
- Exposure to finance, operations, and organizational management concepts is critical

Clinical Credibility and Early Leadership Exposure

- Build a strong foundation as a practicing physician
- Earn trust through reliability, professionalism, collaboration, and consistent delivery of performance outcomes
- Begin stepping into leadership by:
 - Serving as a medical director or physician group leader
 - Participating in medical staff leadership or professional societies
- Develop a reputation as someone willing to help solve problems and step up when needed
- Understand local and community landscape and healthcare needs

Transition From Clinical Leadership to Operational Roles

- Move beyond traditional physician roles into system-level responsibilities
 - Take on roles such as: Medical Director, Site, regional or system CMO
 - Administrative or operational leadership positions
- Learn to think beyond individual specialty and develop a systems-level understanding of how all departments – clinical and non-clinical – come together to achieve organizational results
- Recognize the outsized impact physicians can have in designing and improving processes
- Involvement in quality improvement (QI) committees / workgroups to understand healthcare system's impact on community health outcomes



Building Operational and Business Expertise

- Develop comfort with:
 - Financial management and resource allocation
 - Operational workflows and efficiency
 - Large-scale process design and implementation
 - Communicating with various levels of staff in system (clinical and non-clinical)
- Gain experience managing time, priorities, and complexity in larger organizations
- Engage in leadership development programs, fellowships, or institutional partnerships to strengthen operational skills

Mentorship, Trust, and Leadership Development

- Seek mentors who:
 - Encourage nontraditional ways of thinking and leading beyond typical clinical role expectations
 - Provide guidance on navigating system-level leadership
 - Advocate for your growth into broader roles
- Build trust with various team members (clinical and non-clinical) through clear communication, self-awareness, and follow-through
- Understand that leadership progression often feels organic rather than linear
- Balance professional growth with personal responsibilities, especially during demanding career stages

Leadership Philosophy and Core Competencies

Effective COOs achieve performance results and consistently demonstrate:

- Strong communication and relationship-building skills with clinical, nonclinical, and public
- Self-awareness and humility
- Ability to lead without relying on clinical authority alone
- Comfort operating in ambiguity and complexity
- Willingness to learn business language and priorities
- Focus on helping others and improving systems rather than seeking praise
- Commitment to identifying talent, retaining talent, investing in people, and building the next generation of leaders – among the most fundamental responsibilities of an effective COO
- Solution-oriented / growth mindset

COO Readiness and Role Assumption

- Show readiness by:
 - Successfully managing large teams and operations
 - Translating strategy into tangible outcomes and sustaining those results over time
 - Leading across administrative and clinical domains
 - Driving accountability through others while maintaining strong team engagement
- Be open to roles that stretch skill sets and broaden organizational impact
- Recognize that physician COOs bring a unique and critical perspective to operations



Key Takeaways for Aspiring COOs

- Pursue the COO pathway with intentionality – seek experiences that broaden scope and build operational depth
- Trust, communication, and mentorship are foundational to advancement
- Business and financial literacy significantly strengthen readiness
- The transition requires stepping outside traditional physician identity into systems leadership
- Identifying and developing talent is not a secondary function – it is a defining measure of COO effectiveness
- Physician voices are essential in operational decision making and process design