

Service Lines are an Effective Means to Achieve Service Excellence

by [Chip Nagle](#)

All healthcare organizations should aim for service excellence in everything they do. To deliver on this promise, many organizations look to service lines as a way to bring maximum value to their patients.

Service lines have existed for 40 plus years because they're effective and focus an organization on caring comprehensively for a segment of the population that has specific and specialized needs. A service line, with the right leadership and if appropriately resourced, can position an organization as a leader and expert from a market share, growth, and revenue perspective. Let's take a look at what service lines look like and things to consider about the implementation and leadership of a service line.



Service Lines In Action

The “Baby Hospital”

A prominent health system in Atlanta has very effectively positioned itself as the leader in Women’s Health and obstetrics specifically.

It was commonly referred to as the “Baby Hospital” and because of strong consumer preference was a “must-have” in every managed care network.

As the service line matured, it became an expert in caring for Women’s Health needs later in life with a prominent center for breast cancer prevention and treatment.

The Winship Cancer Institute

The first and only National Cancer Institute-designated center in Georgia was Emory Healthcare's way to position itself in the region as the leader in Cancer Care. Because of its academic and research focus, this is a perfect fit strategically for a cancer care service line.

Emergency Services

Another health system with multiple hospitals has established a service line in Emergency Services. They focus their resources and support on the unique operational aspects of this very important service because 15%-20% of an organization's inpatient admissions originate in this department.

This is a perfect way to address disaster planning/emergency preparedness, trauma, and throughput in a large multi-hospital system. It also brings standardization, order, and optimization to a very important revenue and cost center for most hospitals.

With these very different examples, one can see how a focus on service lines is valuable from a service excellence standpoint.



Service Line Implementation and Leadership

Service Lines should be an area of focus for organizations because they have potential for growth, enhanced revenues, and profit. Implementation of a service line must start with an organization's strategic planning process. The importance of the service line needs to be prominently stated in the strategic plan and then positioned in the organizational structure to operationalize and support its relative importance.

For a service line to come to life, there has to be a plan to commit additional resources to it. For example:

An organization might hire a particular specialist that has a lot of expertise in orthopedics. They also may be interested in robotics, which means they will have to look at their capital and make room for this new investment.

In either case, this new orthopedics service line will need leaders who can execute on that particular area of focus.

Typically, service line leadership consists of two positions:

1) “Service Line Administrator” who has an operational, financial, and strategic acumen and 2) “Medical Director” with credentials in the medical/clinical aspects of the specialty.

When recruiting for talent to fill these positions, organizations need to look for these qualities:

- Clinical knowledge and expertise in the service line/specialty
- Innovative and strategic thinking
- Strong customer service orientation with a passion for the specific population served
- Collaborative but persistent in advocating for the service line
- Analytical skills – must be able to convert data to meaningful and compelling information related to market share, profit/loss, volume trending, budgeting, and forecasting.

Find the Right Leaders for Your Service Line

If service lines are an integral part of your structure and you have a need for leadership talent, Nagle and Associates has a whole host of subject matter experts who understand the unique aspects of what is required in a service line leader.