

Academic Leadership

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21st century medicine calls for an even stronger link with science and technology, and for medical leaders to be *au fait* with cutting edge research. At the same time, hospitals, under pressure, find it more difficult than ever to educate “researcher – physicians”. Chairmanship in academic medicine appears as an impossible equation, requiring in the same person a great clinician, teacher, researcher, manager, fund-raiser – and last but not least a leader! The difficulty of the task is illustrated by the fact that a chair in academic medicine lasts only for half as long as a university president.

Yet great chairs do make a difference. Quantitative parameters of success do exist, i.e. H Index, teaching appreciations and funding successes, but leadership itself is hard to quantify. My view is that a successful leader first creates a sense of urgency, and builds a team to lead the change. She/he eliminates obstacles to action. Leaders develop a clear vision, a strategy, and communicate this vision and strategy at every opportunity. They achieve short-term wins to create momentum, and then continue relentlessly to favor change, embedding it into the culture of their institution. In brief, according to Robert Jarvik “Leaders are visionaries with a poorly developed sense of fear and no concept of the odds against them”.

In order to improve academic medical chairs selection, long-term strategies will have to be implemented: 1) eliminate ‘baronies’ by increasing the number of faculty; 2) develop a clinical tenure-track system to augment the talent-pool; 3) develop career planning; 4) recognize clinical excellence by creating clinical professorships; 5) last but not least, hire the best, internationally.

As for the selection process itself, I recommend considering leadership as the key parameter, with the qualities of an outstanding researcher, clinician or manager in addition. Department chairs should be nominated (by a committee composed of senior managers and external experts) rather than elected, with potential confirmation through re-election after an initial period.