

# The Analogy of the Hive

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With tongue firmly placed in cheek, I offer a comparison of the functioning of a beehive and that of a health care organization. I found the similarities striking.

Bees are well organized. They divide themselves into three groups: worker bees, drones, and, of course, the solitary queen bee. Each bee has its job. For example, the worker bees gather nectar from whatever flowers are available and bring it back to the hive where it is converted to honey and then stored within the honeycomb. While some worker bees act as scouts to find flowers and others act as defenders of the hive, they all work together for a common purpose: the production of honey.

The drones have a very different job. When compared to the worker bees, they are fewer in number, and as it turns out, their job is really quite simple: they mate with the queen bee and die. That's it.

The queen's job is simply to lay eggs, which, in a short time, will produce additional worker bees to at least maintain or even increase the hive's population and augment the production of honey. She is pampered and preened. She does no other work.

In health care today, the worker bees are the physicians, nurses, and other health care professionals. These

"providers" (as they are now called having been conveniently lumped together) see patients, render diagnoses, and provide treatment, thereby producing income for the institution.

The drones in health care have a slightly different job compared to those in the hive. In health care they are called "Middle Management." Their job is to give administrative support to the worker bees... er... "providers" in order to allow them to do their job more efficiently. They relieve the "providers" of administrative duties so they can make more honey... oops... money for the institution. Their loyalty, however, is not to the "providers" but rather it is to the queen bee... sorry... the CEO from whom all blessings flow.

The CEO's job is also supposed to be in support of the "providers" but he or she is usually more concerned with the amount of honey... whoops... money produced versus the amount consumed. This is referred to as "The Budget." Worship of this immutable document occupies much of the queen's... excuse me... CEO's time, leaving little time left to support the activity of the "providers."

The drones... no... the middle managers wholeheartedly support the work of the CEO and strive daily to make a square peg fit into a round hole (balancing the budget). This gives them an excuse to ignore the very important needs of the "providers" such as convenient

parking places, coffee and donuts in the lounge, scheduling as few patients as economically possible, ample time off, etc, etc, etc.

Now, if the worker bees... slipped again, sorry... "providers" don't see enough patients, their honey ration (paycheck) is reduced to reflect the fact that they aren't producing enough income. But if the CEO can keep the institution afloat or even show a bit of profit, extra honey may be issued as a reward.

In health care, as in the hive, the whole shebang is dependent on how many worker bees/"providers" there are, how many flowers/patients are visited/seen and how much honey/money is made. Without the worker bees/"providers" there would be no need for drones/middle management or a queen bee/CEO. Conversely, without drones/middle managers or a queen bee/CEO it would be difficult, if not impossible, for the worker bees/"providers" to function.

It should be noted here that beehives don't have the equivalent of a medical director. They don't need one. Each bee knows exactly what its job is and does not aspire to anything else. There is no friction between the worker bees, the drones, and the queen. Bees don't discriminate. Flowers don't sue.

Health care institutions, on the other hand, need to have a go between for "providers" (especially for physicians) and the administration.

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Bees never complain to the queen. Physicians do. Bees never gripe about a lack of space, not enough help, or the absence of flowers; they just do their job to the best of their ability with what they have to work with. Physicians, well, do occasionally gripe a bit. This defines the role of the medical director: to help the physicians do their job.

The medical director must carry

the physician's message to the queen bee... there I go again... the CEO that certain things are needed to get the job done properly and make honey... uff da... money for the institution. The medical director must also be able to communicate to the physicians when they can't get what they want because of budgetary constraints. Hence the job of the medical director is

partly worker bee and partly drone and there is no bee in the hive that would do such a job!

Therefore, who is the most important bee in the hive? They all are. They all depend on each other for their existence. This is the very essence of symbiosis and bees do it very well. Physicians and administrators should take note: there is a lesson to be learned here.

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