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Conducting a SWOT Analysis – A Useful Framework for Medical Physics Strategic Planning

E.S. Sternick and B.H. Curran

Purpose: To describe the use of SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis for medical physics strategic planning.

Method and Materials: An organizational profile review of a department's medical physics staff serves as an essential preamble to the SWOT Analysis methodology. The intent of the profile study is to define important components of the work environment including: purpose, mission, vision, values, reporting relationships, workforce relationships, vendor relationships, regulatory environment and productivity tracking. A four-quadrant SWOT matrix that is consistent with the results of the profile study is created to identify Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats to be used by the medical physics team as an aid in the design of appropriate action items that will lead to successful strategic outcomes. Strengths are organizational characteristics that contribute positively to achieving the defined objectives. Weaknesses are organizational characteristics that are detrimental to achieving the defined objectives. Opportunities are external factors that will assist with achieving the defined objectives. Threats are external factors that could hinder achieving the defined objectives.

Results: This methodology facilitates the implementation of specific medical physics operational objectives by utilizing team-based "brainstorming" techniques that focus on carefully targeted initiatives.

Conclusion: SWOT Analysis is a well-established management planning tool that has been employed advantageously by diverse industries, including health care, for many years. It is a useful system also for providing medical physicists with a structured, systematic approach in the pursuit of performance excellence.