Hal Teitelbaum, M.D., is not interested in maintaining the status quo. As managing partner and founder of Crystal Run Healthcare, Middletown, N.Y., Teitelbaum started the multispecialty group in 1994 to combat the growing clout of managed-care organizations and to enable patients to receive the highest quality care.

This meant shaking up the system. “We saw increasing difficulties in providing high-quality care without controlling more of the system,” Teitelbaum says. “The whole reason for forming the practice was to gain control.” Teitelbaum also believes delivering optimal patient care means creating the best possible work environment for physicians and staff, and providing them with the most up-to-date information technology, clinical services and back-office business support.

But in the popular summer vacation area of the lower Catskill Mountains and mid-Hudson Valley, about 65 miles northwest of New York, Teitelbaum faced many obstacles in building the practice to 130 physicians in seven offices.

From Day One, the fledgling group faced a boycott from local primary-care physicians who refused to refer patients because they did not want competition. Undaunted, Teitelbaum recruited his own primary-care physicians.

But once Crystal Run grew into multiple offices, the lack of centralized patient medical records caused staff to waste time looking for patient histories. The problem was solved in 1999, when the group installed an electronic health-record system. More recently, 62 of the group’s physicians experienced difficulties in gaining full privileges at 274-bed Catskill Regional Medical Center in nearby Sullivan County.

In June, Crystal Run’s physicians resigned from Catskill Regional’s medical staff, complaining to the state’s Department of Health about quality problems and alleging discriminatory medical staff bylaws. After the state cited the hospital in Harris for four quality violations in late September, the hospital’s president and chief executive officer, Arthur Brien, resigned.

In recognition of his business acumen and commitment to expanding patient access, the American College of Medical Practice Executives and the Medical Group Management Association have chosen Teitelbaum as their 2006 Physician Executive of the Year. “He exemplifies the business orientation that we look for in physician leaders,” says William Jessee, MGMA president and CEO. “You see so many doctors who see something wrong in the industry and complain about it. He has done something about it.”

Born in Queens and raised on Long Island, Teitelbaum spent most summers until medical school in Sullivan County, where his grandparents owned and operated a bagel bakery. His father was an accountant who wanted Teitelbaum to join his practice. “I knew I wanted to be a physician since I was 5 years old. I had no doubt in my mind,” he says.

After his residency in internal medicine at New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center and a fellowship in medical oncology at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in 1980, he joined the faculty of Albert Einstein College of Medicine. In 1982, Teitelbaum moved to Orange County, N.Y., where he met his wife, Jennifer. Along with partner Robert Dinsmore, Teitelbaum in 1994 laid the groundwork for Crystal Run by deciding to hire two oncologists and a cardiologist. Teitelbaum soon realized he needed more business skills, so in 1996 he enrolled at Columbia Business School. He earned an executive MBA in 1998.

In 2005, Teitelbaum was named the second most powerful individual in the Hudson Valley and Catskill region by the Times Herald-Record newspaper.

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