

# Developing Sustained Competitive Advantages in Spine Practice

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## Abstract

Competition is rapidly increasing across all specialties in the field of medicine due to increase in the number of doctors as well as developing technological and marketing changes. It is mandatory to develop and sustain the advantage of surgical skill in particular specialty for the long-term to take advantage of the experience and skills. Fierce competition in turn decreases the overall practice if we do not sustain the competitive advantage which we have in the beginning. It is imperative that we develop sustained competitive advantage to sustain and grow our professional journey for the long-term. In this article we have focussed on how to develop a sustained competitive advantage in the field of spine surgery which can be also applied to other surgical or medical specialties like the other business industries.

**Keywords:** Medical Profession, Fierce competition, Sustained competitive advantage, Grow professional competence

In the modern world, competition is fiercely increasing across all industry; and similarly, health care system is also not barred from it. Competition emphasizes immense pressure on improving quality, reducing cost, better post-treatment care and long-term sustainability along with use of modern technologies in the field of healthcare. Healthcare system can be divided in to basic two types of major division based on competition: Physician dominated system where patient satisfaction and competitiveness primarily depends upon physician dominant care and patients pay out-of-pocket expenditure for their health which is a non-price competition [1]; and non-physician dominated or insurance dominated system where competition is mainly dependent upon reducing price to the patients or insurance company which is basically a price competition [2]. Developing competitive advantage in both the system can help in developing and sustaining the health care organization for the long-term if we apply similar principles of developing strategies in any business [3-4]. If we apply strategic management principles to healthcare, developing competitive advantage is often depends upon reviewing external/surrounding environment, identifying organization's strength and weakness as a part of internal

analysis, and identifying the organization's service area to find our opportunities and threats are critical factors [5]. After reviewing all factors, 1. if we can develop certain factors which are valuable to our patients/stakeholders, 2. if it is rare amongst the competitors, 3. if it is difficult for competitors to imitate/copy and 4. if organization can sustain for a longer time, it creates a long-term sustainable competitive advantage in health care system [6-7]. The purpose of this article was to identify and develop certain competitive advantages in the field of spine care. Our hope thereby is to apply similar principles in other specialties as well to be better as a healthcare provider.

The competitive advantage of a business the field of health care industry depends upon mainly three criteria: doctor/physician choice, use of medical technologies and waiting time for the treatment [8]. These three are the primary criteria for patient deciding about treatment preferences. The location of hospital, type of hospital including category, level of economic status, insurance companies etc will follow once the first three criteria are fulfilled. Objectives of gaining or developing competitive advantage in a nutshell revolves around the patient. In marketing term, it is a management process that involves the assessment of customers wants and needs, and the performance of all activities associated with the development, pricing, provision, and promotion of product that satisfy patients' wants and needs; in other words, creating value for the customers. Thus, it is an ongoing process which must be actively managed; brings attention to the Four Ps- Product, Price, Place and Promotion- which must be formulated for the target audience with customer centric approach by conveying the meaning in a proper way to the patients to satisfy their

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needs and wants to create a value proposition. Now let us identify the process that can be utilized by clinician to identify and create competitive advantage and disadvantage in general. The goal of internal analysis is to identify the organization's or physician's current and potentially relevant strength and weakness which are valued by the external stakeholders means patients. Competitive relevance is often determined by considering four important questions: 1. Question of value. Asking question is the resource, competency, or capability create value to the patients? 2. Question of rareness. Is organization or physician possessing the resource, competency, or capability that many or all of its competitor do not have? 3. Question of Imitability. Asking question is it easy or difficult for the competitors to copy those resource, competency, or capability? and 4. Question of Sustainability. Asking question if resource, competency, or capability can be sustained for a longer period? The judgement of creating competitive advantage is by analysing these four questions sequentially. Creating sustained competitive advantage in the field of healthcare is to reach to the fourth question after passing first three questions one by one. In the field of spine surgery, creating sustained competitive advantage should follow as below sequentially [9].

### **1. Question of Value:**

Ask yourself as a physician or as an organization working in the field of spine surgery, whether the organization have resources, competency, or capabilities for spine surgery? Resource means the set-up, operation rooms, hospital staff, rehabilitation facility and instrumentation for spine surgery. Competency means if organization or physician is competent enough to handle all categories of spine care services along with the qualification and skills of each physician and associated staff. Capabilities means if the organization or physician has the capabilities to handle the spine cases in their premises including well managed indoor and outdoor department, well equipped operation rooms and preservice and post-service care personnel. The judgement of these question should be in terms of value which is High or Low. To proceed to generating competitive advantage of spine care services, the answer must be in High (H). If your answer is Low (L), you cannot generate relevant competitive advantage and need to think and process again to find an answer in terms of High Value.

### **2. Question of Rareness:**

This question focuses of analysing rareness about spine services among the competitors in terms of resources, competency, or capability. As we all know that spine services are being provided by multiple specialities such as physicians, orthopaedic surgeons, neurosurgeons, chiropractors, bone settlers, general practitioners, physiotherapists, and other

allied branches such as homeopathy, ayurvedics, unani etc. As an organization we need to analyse that the spine services which is provided by your organization is well qualified and highly skilled physician who is specially trained in spine and being a rare specialty other all competitor organization do not have that qualification and skill. Means we need to decide that resources mean facilities, competency means physician qualification and capability means skill set to treat spine cases are rare that you possess in the organization and most of the other organization do not have that much standardised selection criteria to work in this field. If your answer to question 2 is Yes (Y), you can proceed to question 3. If your answer is no (N), you must develop rareness in this field [10].

### **3. Question of Imitability:**

This specific issue focusses whether your competitor can replicate the required resources, competency, and capabilities in the service area. Answer for this question should be with two options: Easy (E) and Difficult (D). If the organization have resources in form of finances, operation rooms, latest technologies in form of navigation, intraoperative neuromonitoring, robotics, endoscopic set up etc.; competency in form of highly skilled and qualifies team of specialist surgeons/physicians; and capabilities in form of scope of further expansion, add more resources and competencies which is difficult for the competitors, the organization will have competitive advantage. If answer is easy to imitate by the competitors, one cannot proceed to next question and competitive advantage cannot be achieved. Therefore, organization need to invest in updating technologically sound as well as training their human resources to gain more skill and competencies will ultimately help in gaining competitive advantage. Thus organization must be aware of imitability by the competitor and constantly improve to remain ahead of competitor to avoid imitability.

### **4. Question of Sustainability:**

Sustainability means how long an organization can sustain with its existing resources, competencies, and capabilities in comparison with its competitors. Suppose an organization working in spine speciality has long history of delivering good/consistent results with additional advantage of first movers in the market, it is very difficult to break for the new competitors and there will be long sustainability of resources, competencies, and capabilities for the organization. Similarly a new organization with backing of a giant corporate with strong finances in developing state of the art institute in spine with hiring highly skilled professionals and surgeons establishes in the service area, it can definitely break the advantages to the existing older organizations that do not possess all such facilities. In contrast, new organization will have sustainable

advantage in terms of resources, competencies and capabilities. Therefore, if organization has resources, competencies and capabilities that can be sustained for long time, the organization will have sustained competitive advantage and such organization will flourish and grow over a period of time. On the other hand, if organization do not have resources, competencies and capabilities that can be sustained for long, organization will have short-run competitive advantage and such organization should focus on how it can convert short-run sustainabilities in to long-run sustainability. If an organization is having world class highly skilled surgeon or technology which is of high value, rare, difficult to imitate and sustainable,

organization can grow and flourish the department in long-run and develop sustainable competitive advantage. If such surgeon leaves and go to the other organization or technology becomes outdated, the sustainability of competitive advantage will decrease or the other organization will have competitive advantage that has the surgeon or latest technology [11]. Therefore, organization must be aware and constantly try to sustain the competitive advantage.

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**Declaration of patient consent:** The authors certify that they have obtained all appropriate patient consent forms. In the form, the patient has given his/her consent for his/her images and other clinical information to be reported in the Journal. The patient understands that his/her name and initials will not be published, and due efforts will be made to conceal his/her identity, but anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

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