

Empowered Employees Increase Quality and Reduce Costs

Better Care Comes from the Bedside – Not the Quality Department

Executive Summary

The hospital industry is being held increasingly accountable for measurable, demonstrable proof that the care of patients is both safe and cost-effective. Payers, employers, accrediting bodies and regulatory agencies are demanding transparency on pricing, quality, and safety.

Signature Hospital Corporation is the parent company to four community hospitals. The leadership at Signature has embraced manufacturing principles, such as lean thinking, to empower nurses, physicians and clinicians.

Challenge

Signature Hospital Corporation has analyzed more than 200,000 medical errors. The analysis showed that 90 percent of all medical errors are caused by faulty hospital systems, not careless caregivers. More importantly, 80 percent of these errors are preventable if hospital management focuses resources on finding and redesigning faulty care systems, rather than blaming individual caregivers for errors.

For the past 50 years, hospital care has been provided through a silo structure, which focuses on a system of accountability that fragments decision making. This creates substantial organizational and communications barriers to effectively manage the care process.

Change to this silo comes from a reality embraced long ago by the manufacturing industry: sustainable excellence can only be attained by the employees “on the assembly line.”

Re-Designing A Process

The front-line employees at St. Joseph’s Hospital in Parkersburg, W.Va. developed a program to decrease operational costs and increase patient safety.

The project began simply enough with a disorganized supply room. Floor nurses were making multiple trips to the supply room, taking precious time away from patient care.

Signature Hospital Corporation

Case Study: St. Joseph’s Hospital in Parkersburg, WV

Industry Issue:

Payers, regulatory agencies and consumers are demanding price and quality transparency.

Signature Response:

Trust and support front-line caregivers to increase patient safety and reduce costs.

St. Joseph’s Challenge:

Re-design a care delivery process to increase the amount of time nurses spend with patients and decrease inventory.

St. Joseph’s Outcomes:

- Reduced 656 miles of walking distance for nurses per unit.
- Saved \$4,300 in linen costs per nursing unit.

“The successful system re-design at St. Joseph’s Hospital is a great example of what empowered employees can do.”

- Charles R. Miller, CEO

www.signaturehospital.com

- The storage room included 2,000 individually packaged spoons and 48 boxes of cereal, along with items used once per quarter.
- Patient personal care items (e.g., shampoo and combs) were stored with suture removal kits.
- Five storage towers contained so much linen that it was difficult to pull it out and linens fell on the floor.

To make finding the supplies easier, they were sorted and placed in categories according to the function of the item. The following items were grouped together: personal care items, IVs, dressing supplies, respiratory supplies and urinary supplies.

The nursing staff used a spaghetti diagram to show the flow of linen distribution on the nursing unit. Linen was handled multiple times by both environmental services and nursing staff, moving it to and from carts and towers before being delivered to the patient's room.

Quality and Cost Figures

Re-organizing the supplies and changing the linen distribution process allowed nurses to spend more time at the bedside and reduced wait time for patients.

- The average nursing unit saved approximately 9,500 feet in walking distance per 24 hour period. This equals 3,467,500 feet (or 656 miles) saved for the average nursing unit on an annual basis.
- When this project is implemented in all nursing units, it will save more than 19,000 miles in the hospital on an annual basis.
- The hospital saved \$4,300 annually in linen cleaning costs (per nursing unit). Linen storage space was reduced by 66 percent.

Key Concepts

To reduce errors and improve quality, hospitals can systematically redesign delivery systems using five strategic initiatives.

1. *Informed Leadership*: Educate the board and senior executives to understand that errors are caused by the failure of hospital delivery systems, rather than caregiver negligence. Hospital boards and senior leadership should also become familiar with approaches taken by manufacturing companies to eliminate unnecessary steps, errors and waste.
2. *Restructuring the Work Place*: Overcome, or at least minimize, the silo departmental approach to decision making.
3. *A New System of Accountability*: Establish a system of individual and departmental accountability. This approach recognizes that the Quality

Department does not change behavior and care practices at the bedside. Only when caregivers are empowered to act will real improvement occur.

4. *Develop Real-Time Error Measurement Systems*: Incorporate the use of new real-time measurement systems into care delivery systems to track, analyze and report errors in the workplace as they occur.
5. *New Industry Incentives*: Reward healthcare providers that share data and demonstrate measurable improvements in patient safety.

Conclusion

The caregivers at St. Joseph's Hospitals were trusted to make decisions and educated on manufacturing concepts, such as lean thinking. Armed with new tools and empowered to make decisions, the front-line employees increased the time nurses spent with patients and reduced inventory, costs and wasted motion.

Good information in the hands of good people always results in improvement. A wide range of innovative approaches to safer care is coming from the bedside and is strengthened by the use of lean thinking.