

'Lean Thinking' improves patient care

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PARKERSBURG — St. Joseph's Hospital has been implementing the concepts of "Lean Thinking" throughout the facility to improve patient care by allowing employees to work hand-in-hand with departments to improve services.

The concept of "Lean Thinking" was started by Toyota and moved into other work environments, including health care.

Over the past several months, St. Joseph's Hospital has been a capstone in implementing the concept throughout Signature Hospital Corp., said Jill Parsons, hospital vice president.

"In essence, Lean allows you to put fresh eyes to a process to reduce waste/delays and to simplify the process to add value to both the patients and employees" she said. "Our 'fresh eyes' come from teams made up of employees from many departments. This allows a new perspective and approach to a challenge."

Since the beginning of the year, the hospital has set aside one week a month when employee teams work on a specific process or other concerns in a department, Parsons said. These activities are called "kaizens."

The process could have a specific goal the team wants

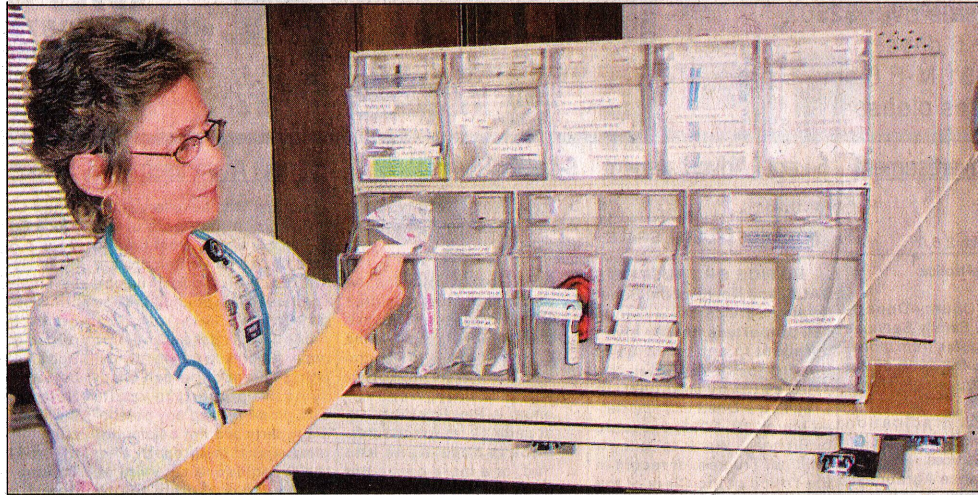


Photo submitted

Sue'ette Hupp, LPN from the 3B Nursing Unit at St. Joseph's Hospital, demonstrates one of the standard supply boxes that were installed in the patient rooms.

to work on or a potential problem will present itself that the team will handle.

A team had gone onto a nursing unit and pulled everything out of storage and determined what was needed and what wasn't, said Marcella Will, hospital's director of education and a Lean team leader for several projects the hospital has done since the beginning of the year.

Through the groups' work, standard supply boxes were installed in the patient rooms. The boxes have frequently used supplies, such as tape, gauze and specimen cups, conveniently located in the patient's room by the bedside.

The nurses had spent a lot of time walking to various

supply rooms to pick up these materials and walk back. Will said, adding having the supplies at hand in the room allow nurses more time for patient care.

In the past, management and others would have series of meetings and implement changes they thought were needed, said Janice Midcap, director of quality.

"This is not just management making changes," Midcap said. "The employees are also part of the changes and improvements.

"A lot of people here are excited, and there is huge interest in the program."

Parsons recently participated in a group that did work on the orthopedic nursing floor that helped lead to the

implementation of the supply boxes in patient rooms.

"We helped the staff simplify their supplies so that they had what they needed, where they needed them and as much as they needed to get their jobs done effectively," she said. "The end result is by having the supplies reorganized in a standard way where everything is labeled, has a home and everyone knows where they are, we have reduced the travel time for our nurses on this floor and they can spend more time at the patient's bedside.

"It was by far the most exciting, exhausting and exhilarating week I have experienced as a member of the team at St. Joseph's."

Through the process, her

team implemented the 5-S principles of sort, set in order, shine, standardize and sustain to the floor. They pulled out supplies, figured out what the people needed to do their jobs and organized them where the employees would get the most use out of them, they removed obsolete supplies no one uses anymore, showed everyone where everything was, gave them a week to try the new system and make improvements where needed.

"By the end of the week, everything was where it needed to be," Parsons said. "So in just a few short days, each team accomplishes what they set out to do without months of meetings and talking about what they want to do - they simply go out and do it."

Teams are meeting this week to do work in the emergency department, the operating rooms and the patient flow process. The teams, made up of 8-12 people, started with a three-hour training session with their Lean consultants, a team from Virginia Mason Hospital in Seattle, Wash., where Lean Thinking in hospitals was launched several years ago. The teams then broke into their projects and will work through Thursday afternoon. On Friday morning, they will have the "report out" where all the teams report their activities and successes.