

Lean, Mean, Well-Managed Machine

Maury Regional Employs Lean Management to Reduce Harm, Increase Efficiency

"We're too busy mopping the floor to turn off the faucet," – Author Unknown

Although the sentiment conjures up a humorous visual image, the reality is hospitals and health systems too often find themselves caught up in this very conundrum. For Maury Regional Medical Center (MRMC), the solution was to put the power back in the hands of those closest to the faucet's off valve.

Since 2011, MRMC has been utilizing a number of Lean techniques as part of the medical center's performance improvement efforts. "When you do Lean, you are changing the culture," said Kristen Wayne, Director of Process & Systems Improvement for MRMC. "You are developing people into critical thinkers and problem solvers."

Although the leadership was excited to see employees using Lean tools to engage in a number of activities, it soon became apparent that making an improvement and sustaining it are two different things. Additionally, some of the problems being addressed, while important, weren't necessarily the highest priorities.

Wayne said the trap of partially using Lean strategies is that employees become equipped to solve issues without actually having a clear picture of overall system needs. "There's a disconnect in the way you are asking people to operate and the way you're actually managing them operationally," Wayne explained.

For MRMC, the next logical step in their process improvement evolution was to empower employees to make meaningful, sustainable change. Last spring, MRMC embraced a Lean Management System (LMS) approach to realize the full benefits of a Lean culture – including decision-making and accountability at all levels – to systemically take the medical center to a new level of performance.

Going to the Gemba

Wayne said one of the first steps was to 'go to the gemba.' She explained, "It's a Japanese term, and it means the place where work is done."

The concept combats the traditional operational setup where managers sit in offices making decisions that might ... or might not ... be practical, effective solutions. "The people who do the work are the resident experts," Wayne noted. "You have to go to the place where the work is being done to understand the work and make real improvements."

In the beginning, two teams – clinical and non-clinical – piloted a huddle structure made up of frontline, director level, and senior leader level huddles. Across huddles, standard questions force members to take stock of where they are, where they want to be, and how to best get there. A visual management board, Wayne added, is an important tool used to track performance improvement opportunities and chronicle key metrics to measure improvement. "We talk about those like they are our scoreboards," she said. "If you are playing a basketball game, you constantly know the score and know if you need to change your offense or defense."

Employees are empowered to make needed changes, and a standard process is in place to move issues quickly up the chain of command when needed. "LMS is designed to be more about the day-to-day operations and escalation of issues," Wayne explained.

"Huddle questions are similar but grow in scope as you go up the chain. You're rising up to the next level as appropriate," said Renee Tew, Administrative Director of Quality Services at MRMC. She added each huddle reports up to the

next level all the way to senior leadership so everyone stays in the loop.

"If you ask our CFO Nick Swift, he will say he knows a lot more, a lot faster because of these very purposeful conversations. He has also said it allows him to make connections across departments more easily," Wayne said of breaking down the silos that so often occur in healthcare.

LMS in Action

Tew pointed to the work being done on pressure ulcers as a good example of LMS in action.

"One of our nursing units, when they developed their visual management board, chose pressure ulcer management," Tew said. "They'd had some lower scores – not necessarily because they were causing ulcers but because they were not doing a good job of assessing and documenting patients on arrival."

Tew continued, "They developed daily metrics that helped drive nursing success to address the issue." During each shift's huddle, the nurses committed to each other to keep track of timely assessments at admission, as well as implementation of the appropriate intervention, if necessary, based upon an assigned score. Tew noted, "It drills down to the individual. What do I do ... or what *don't* I do ... that impacts our numbers?"

She added, "With that daily tracking, they were better able to predict success."

In fact, Tew said, "The unit had zero pressure ulcers on their last quarterly report."

One of the first departments to implement the LMS strategy was imaging. Tew said an outcome she and Wayne didn't anticipate was how positive physicians would become about the process. Tew noted when the concept was first presented to staff radiologists, they agreed to participate ... but with a marked lack of excitement. "Today, if we tried to take it away, they would revolt," she said with a laugh. "It has made their days so much more predictive and efficient."

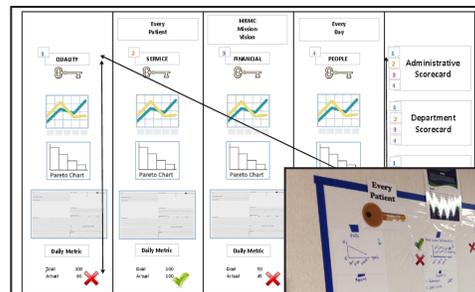
MRMC's Journey so Far

To date, the health system has recognized more than \$4 million in savings, seen sustained improvement in key quality areas, undertaken more than 800 projects of varying sizes, educated more than 1,500 employees in the basic Lean concepts and nearly 300 in advanced strategies, and encouraged leadership at every level.

Tew noted the success of various huddles has fostered a sense of healthy competition. "We're seeing in many of these metrics the highest results we've ever achieved. That breeds a higher level of performance. If everyone else is doing it, you don't want to be the one to not make your goals."

Wayne said MRMC has deployed LMS in about half of the organization's departments at this point. She noted the biggest issue so far is impatience among those who haven't yet gotten to launch a huddle. "People are so excited that they want to do it. It's a real testament to the culture."

The Tennessee Center for Patient Safety, a department of the Tennessee Hospital Association, develops and shares hospital and health system success stories and promotes best practices.



Visual Management Boards Keep the Huddle on Track

