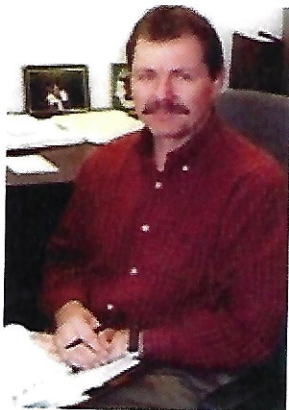


By Nicole Clement

## **Flex Success: Charles Cole Hospital in Pennsylvania Uses Lean Training to Improve Efficiency!**

"One of the best aspects of the Flex Program is the sharing that occurs between the various state programs. The experiences of other states in implementing Lean training encouraged us in Pennsylvania to consider Lean for our critical access hospitals (CAHs). When one of our University Continuing Education units developed a Lean training program specifically for health care, it was the ideal situation," noted Larry Baronner, Flex Coordinator in Pennsylvania regarding their decision to offer Lean training.

Lean is a practice that considers the expenditure of resources for any goal other than the creation of value for the end customer to be wasteful, and therefore a target for elimination. Lean is centered on preserving value with less work. It is based on optimizing flow toward increasing efficiency, decreasing waste, and using methods to decide what matters, rather than accepting pre-existing ideas.



Larry Baronner, Flex  
Coordinator,  
Pennsylvania

Baronner invited continuing education staff to one of the quarterly CAH meetings to present the Lean Training Program being offered and saw immediate interest. The leadership team at Charles Cole Memorial Hospital, a Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) top quality hospital located in Coudersport, PA, realized it needed to identify a system-wide strategy for performance improvement and Lean culture development. Realizing that there are numerous Lean models available, they wanted to determine what model would be the best fit for their organization and that is when they became aware of an opportunity for Lean training through the Pennsylvania Flex Program. Based on organizational knowledge, they determined that this program would be a great fit for the organization. Through this program, four individuals were initially trained on Lean, two of the trained staff went on to become organizational instructors for the program.

One of the biggest challenges that hospital leadership faced was building Lean principles into their culture. To meet this challenge, they brought together a Lean Steering Team comprised of individuals from across their organization and developed a formal planning document that will be the roadmap of how this work will be accomplished over the next several years.

Janice Walters, Executive Director of Revenue Systems and Primary Care Services, oversees the Lean project within the organization. She shared her advice on the fundamental principle of sustainability within the organizational culture, "One important piece of implementing Lean is to engage the frontline staff so they feel empowered and can fully embrace the process. Sustainable change has to come from



the frontline where the work happens every day."

Walters noted that continuity across the organization is key to success. It is important to get all of the staff on board so they have at least a basic understanding of Lean. Walters stated that in order to achieve this goal, "We are currently doing the second session of the 7 week training class. We initially trained 16 individuals and now we are training an additional 16 staff members. This level of training will continue until we have a critical mass of employees trained on fundamental Lean principles."

A high-level 2-hour training program has been developed and is being rolled out to front-line staff members to raise awareness and give basic instruction on the principles. "Our goal is to train 50% of the staff on this 2-hour program this fiscal year so that employees have a high level concept of what Lean is and can understand the importance of this change within the organization." The 2-hour training program is also now part of the new employee orientation program at Charles Cole Memorial Hospital.



Original four Lean training class participants: Ben Bickford, Director of Staff Development; BJ Lowther, Eastern Region Manager (Lean Trainer); Janice Walters, Executive Director Revenue Systems and Primary Care Services; Brett Klein, Decision Support Analyst (Lean Trainer)

Examples of projects completed at Charles Cole Memorial Hospital as a result of this Lean program include:

- Change in lab specimen processes to reduce baggage costs and increase



efficiency. Pre-electronic health record processes were being followed which required each specimen to be separately bagged. A new system was developed that allowed for proper specimen identification and safety precaution but eliminated the need to separately bag each specimen. The change increased staff efficiency and reduced costs.

- Purchase of ice machine allows for reduction in movement to increase efficiency. Through the training process it was identified that nursing staff had to go to the 3rd floor to retrieve ice for patients. As a result of the study process, it was determined that it was cost effective to purchase an ice machine for the 4th floor. Both patient experience and employee experiences were impacted by this change.
- Change in daily cash collection processes from physician office locations. Previously, money bags were delivered to the cashier by office staff throughout the day. This resulted in lost productivity of office staff in addition to inefficiency in the cashier's office. The cashier did not know when the bags would be delivered which led to redundancy of processes. It was identified that all physician office staff go to the mail room on a daily basis. As a result a lock-box was placed in the mailroom for money bags. The cashier now makes one trip to the mailroom and retrieves all of the bags at one time. This resulted in improved efficiency for both the office and cashiering staff and improved employee satisfaction.
- Purchase of walkie-talkies increases communication and decreases wait time and excess movement. The environmental services department had no effective way of communicating real-time needs. The department supervisor would have to walk around the facility to locate staff to help with identified needs. As a result of this program, walkie-talkies were purchased and implemented within this department which allows for effective, real-time communication. Both efficiency and employee satisfaction improved as a result of this project.

As part of the Lean process, all identified projects continue to be reviewed post-implementation to ensure that the changes implemented are sustainable. All projects are implemented as tests to see if the desired result has been accomplished and if additional changes are required. Walters noted, "The goal of building a Lean culture is to never settle for the way things are, but to challenge ourselves to find better, more efficient ways to meet and hopefully exceed expectations."

Charles Cole Memorial Hospital realizes that building a Lean culture is a journey that will take years to attain. The important thing is that it knows this and is dedicating the resources necessary to allow this work to be accomplished in the coming years.

The Pennsylvania Flex Program is considering offering more Lean training. Baronner noted, "We have plans to offer the program in other regions of the state this year. Two CAHs in the south central region have expressed interest in participating in the Lean Training in early 2013. One CAH that is part of a health care system has also expressed interest in participating if the program is offered to their system. Two CAHS in the south central region and another that is part of a health care system have expressed interest."

## **Flex Program Forum**

Don't miss the ongoing discussions on the [Flex Program Forum](#). This is your chance