

## **Does Your Healthcare Quality Program Follow These Time Tested Quality Criteria?**

There are many benefits for a healthcare program of any size which follows a continuous quality improvement program. Using programs like Six Sigma, Baldrige criteria, and lean manufacturing that have been successfully employed by service agencies for years and now by some forward thinking healthcare providers, you can improve your bottom line, save precious time, and improve patient health and satisfaction. If you are like many healthcare providers you probably are somewhat defensive about healthcare and its place in the community. After all, are you a bit defensive about the sky rocketing costs of healthcare and about the need to prevent errors? Don't you wish that you could be appreciated for providing excellent services and that you got your just rewards for all your hard work? A good quality program can go a long way towards achieving these goals and help you find the pleasure in care giving that you wish for.

### **What are some of the important characteristics of a good quality improvement program?**

1. Your organization has a strategic plan that is understood and supported by all—that is, every employee and caregiver. The plan should be patient orientated. Everyone should feel responsible in achieving the goals of the plan and feel free to take any corrective action or get help if anything detracts from the achievement of the goals.
2. Leadership should be active in reviewing and supporting the quality program. Top management should put a great deal of emphasis on setting high standards for patient care and health and ensure that the quality program is integral in reaching these goals. Support and understanding as well as incentives to try innovative approaches should be a priority of leadership.
3. Your quality program should use tools such as charting, surveys and process analysis as well as other common quality tools, to reach the standards set by your organization for patient care and satisfaction. Your program must be proactive, not reactive. As manufacturers have long known, quality is designed into a system; errors and waste are not inspected out. JCAHO evaluations and other accreditation programs are mostly reactive.
4. You need to be aware of the needs and views of your patients and clients. Your program should have a continual way to assess the views and health of patients and clients. It is not enough to believe you are doing a good job, you must find out what your patient believes, because that is the true measure of client satisfaction. You should be using surveys designed and administered by your staff to find out.
5. Your employees should be empowered and you should understand their needs and attitudes. Every employee affects the satisfaction and health of your patients. Employees who feel their employers listen and respond to them will make a huge difference in the outcomes of your health organization. No employee is insignificant. You can insure that employees feel respected by having clear lines

- of communication, by listening carefully, and by responding positively to their suggestions. One way to do this is by using employee surveys.
6. Does your organization operate as compartments, departments or individual silos? Do departments or individuals act as if there are tasks and jobs that are theirs and that no one else should infringe on these or try to add more? Quality organizations and individuals in the organizations see themselves as a part of a whole. All are interconnected and willing to help others.
  7. Are your quality standards clear and meaningful? This means not only patient health and satisfaction, but that all areas are integrated and effective and that variation in reaching goals is as small as possible. Are there clear measures of success in all activities?

These are the important measure of quality of a healthcare organization. Somewhat different perspectives of these ideas are presented in the Baldrige criteria, which can be found online, and by W. Edwards Demings fourteen quality criteria. Comparing your organization to these can dramatically improve the delivery of the benefits described in the opening of this paper. In fact, I recommend that you find and read through the Baldrige self evaluation process to get a wider view of the principles outlined above. You can find it at [http://www.quality.nist.gov/HealthCare\\_Criteria.htm](http://www.quality.nist.gov/HealthCare_Criteria.htm).