

Medical Records Department Posts Dramatic Reductions in Processing Time, Delinquency Rate



The Problem

The central Patient Medical Records department at this three-hospital for-profit health system was overwhelmed with unprocessed paperwork. Stacks of charts and thousands of loose sheets of patient information were piled on desks and the floor in a cramped, poorly-lit work area. Unable to eliminate the backlog, staff struggled with low morale and regularly faced physicians, patients, and other customers who were dissatisfied by the department's inability to provide the requested information in a timely and accurate manner.

The LEAN Healthcare Solution

With Healthcare Performance Partners (HPP) assistance, a 17-member team applied LEAN HEALTHCARE tools and principles to rectify the problem. The team used value-stream maps and process maps to examine the sources of patient records, stopping points for the records, and how the records were handled at those stopping points. Tracking sheets and spaghetti diagrams allowed the team to trace the physical path of records and record-handlers through the hospital. In addition, the team evaluated the suitability and comfort of the Records workspace, with attention to layout and workflow as well as equipment such as computers and phones.

This comprehensive assessment revealed a number of issues:

- A lack of standardized work practices and unbalanced flow in the Medical Records department, lead to an inefficient work process and confusion regarding individual staff members' responsibilities
- Poor communication between hospital departments, resulting in spotty data collection
- Inadequate Records workspace, with lack of space, out-of-date equipment, and frequent distractions causing disorganization, lost records, inefficient processing of patient information, and a delinquency rate of 60%.

The team implemented a variety of LEAN HEALTHCARE solutions to address these issues. They created an accountability system for the Records department, clearly outlining each employee's responsibilities, and coordinated information-gathering with nursing work cycles to ensure that collected charts would be complete. HPP also led a redesign of the Records workspace to improve layout and filing, upgrade lighting and equipment, and minimize distractions.

The Outcome

Initial results of LEAN HEALTHCARE implementation show a marked improvement in Patient Records efficiency and effectiveness. Staff have processed all backlogged charts and half of all loose sheets. The department has posted a 50% reduction in lead time (an average of 67 minutes per patient) and almost doubled the number of charts it can process simultaneously, saving \$1.5 million annually in related payroll costs. Delinquency, which impacted non-recurring hospital cashflow by \$1 million, has dropped more than 10 percentage points to less than 50%. Staff morale and customer satisfaction has seen dramatic increases as well.



To discuss how HPP can assist with your LEAN HEALTHCARE journey or Six Sigma Implementation: Call 615-265-2002 or e-mail: chagood@hpp.bz
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