CASE STUDY

University Hospitals and Kent State University Partner to Drive Continuous Improvement

University Hospitals

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY | Center for Corporate and Professional Development

THE CHALLENGE

Today there are significant challenges facing health care systems. The new laws and market demands require health care systems to contain costs while achieving high quality outcomes and satisfying rising patient expectations. According to Mary Mosquera, contributing writer for Healthcare Finance News, "Health executives continue to seek approaches to rein in the costs of their core operations, reduce utilization through standardization and manage care variations." At the same time, health care leaders must develop new revenue streams to make the investments necessary to remain relevant in the ever-changing marketplace.

University Hospitals (UH) in Northeast Ohio is taking a proactive approach to meet these challenges so the system can attain its vision, "to be the premier integrated health system by providing access to the highest quality health care at a competitive price."

THE SOLUTION

University Hospitals' Department of Operational Effectiveness efforts are instrumental to organizational efforts in improving clinical care and customer satisfaction while lowering costs for the delivery of high quality patient service. The department's objectives are to identify and support process improvement initiatives, manage key strategic initiatives to reduce cycle time to deployment and improvement, lead Lean Six Sigma initiatives and drive cost reduction throughout the system.

This UH group is partnering with The Center for Corporate and Professional Development at Kent State University to meet these objectives. Several of the Operational Effectiveness engineers who serve as process improvement coaches attended Kent State's Lean Six Sigma training and certification to attain their Lean Six Sigma Black Belt or Master Black Belt credentials. They also gained skills as project managers by attaining Kent State's Certificate in Managing Projects.

Further, Kent State's Center partners with UH's Department of Operational Effectiveness to deliver a Lean certification tailored specifically for the health care industry and specific to UH's objectives. Kent State's five-day Lean Health Care Certification provides UH managers and professionals with a solid foundation focusing on Lean tools and methodologies. As Dave Delost, Manager of Performance Improvement, states, "Our leadership commitment promise as an organization is to inspire, innovate and achieve. The Lean and Six Sigma tools and methodologies really lend themselves very well to be one of the key sets of tools to allow us to do that as an organization."

During this training program, participants gain knowledge and skills in three critical areas: business purpose, process and people. Participants receive worksheets, formulas and step-by-step methodologies to apply the Lean tools immediately in their everyday continuous improvement efforts. To receive their certification, participants work in project teams to complete a process improvement initiative that is reviewed by UH Leadership and Kent State University's Lean Six Sigma facilitators.

ABOUT UNIVERSITY HOSPITALS

University Hospitals (UH) is one of the nation's leading health care systems, providing high-quality, patient-centered medical care at locations throughout Northeast Ohio. More than 25,000 physicians and employees constitute the University Hospitals system, ranking it Northeast Ohio's second largest private sector employer. University Hospitals' goal is to provide comprehensive primary and community-based care, as well as access to the highest quality specialty care.

Learn more: www.uhhospitals.org

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THE RESULTS

This training is available to selected candidates from all UH locations and facilities. The training and certification are delivered multiple times each year; each session with 20 participants representing five improvement teams who engage in the learning and project certification. The value associated with the participants' improvement projects equates to millions of dollars in cost savings and revenue generation. The projects focus on identifying and eliminating waste, improving outcomes and quantifying the cost of poor quality. UH process improvement efforts focus in areas such as High Reliability Medicine (HRM) and Value Improvement Process (VIP). HRM is aimed at reducing variation in care in order to achieve the highest levels of patient quality and safety outcomes. Endeavors include reducing joint patient length of stay, early patient discharge, urology oncology care variation and reducing sepsis mortality rates. VIP efforts center on eliminating non-value added activity and associated cost while increasing operational capacity and revenue.

The teams' process improvement projects demonstrate real, measurable results including validated real dollar returns. To date, UH has realized a 24 to 1 return on investment with the Kent State Lean Health Care Certification. As UH aims to become a truly transformative healthcare organization and strives to deliver the highest quality services, this training provides the foundation for team members to be inspired, innovative and apply lean tools, methods and principals to achieve outstanding results. These team members apply the valuable skills learned every day, as now they are trained to "see" opportunities for improvement. Further, as the project teams report out the results of their process improvement projects, UH leaders share best practices and apply the lessons learned in one project to other locations and functions within the system.

"Our goal: Drive the Triple Aim, simultaneously improving the health of the population, enhancing the experience and outcomes of the patient, and reducing per capita cost of care for the benefit of communities."

– Institute for Healthcare Improvement

"Packed full of useful information you can take back and use on a daily basis to improve your workflow."

– Robert Quinn
Operations Specialist