Lean Thinking and the Use of Huddle Boards to Identify Opportunities for Improvement
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Submission Type: Programmatic
Topic Area: Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement
Poster Number: 88

Overview: Lean thinking is becoming the mainstay in healthcare management because of rapidly changing policies and the vagaries of the economy. “Do more with less,” is becoming the daily mantra for healthcare leaders. To do more with less, leaders are turning to the time-proven Lean manufacturing strategies of the Toyota Production System. Using the Lean system involves creating improvement through a series of simple changes to improve process flow and lead to improved outcomes. The team huddle, where members work to identify opportunities for improvement and work through the Plan, Do, Check, Act/Adjust cycle of continuous improvement is a key component of Lean thinking. A visual system, a huddle board, is used to track the progress of each project. The board helps the team to plan projects strategically based on feasibility at the time of the discussion. Lean thinking and “huddling” help our HRPP team work through organizational challenges marked by limited resources and personnel, decentralized research coordinators, and the integration of the research paradigm of a new hospital that has recently joined our health system. These conditions have led each research group to develop their own workflow for just about everything; an approach that is difficult to manage and frustrates everyone.

Additional Information: To address these problems, a work group consisting of HRPP staff, research coordinators, and others from throughout the system was formed to identify opportunities for improvement. To accomplish these goals, we are using Lean strategies and a huddle board. The visualization of the projects and the prioritizing implementation helps us to remain focused on completing the tasks. To date, our huddle team has identified 13 opportunities for improvement and has accomplished three of them. Five are in progress and five are on hold to keep the workload manageable. Overall, the work group members are pleased with the progress of the projects and welcome the opportunity to be part of the solution. Lean thinking and the use of huddle boards is becoming commonplace in healthcare management. There are many ways to modify and incorporate these strategies into our daily practice. Staff members embrace this new way of thinking because they are involved in the process from start to finish. The best part is celebrating the successes!