

Success Story:

Embracing Quality Improvement Processes Lead to Improved Dining and Resident Satisfaction

Background

Food quality and the overall eating experience can impact nursing home residents significantly. If the food and experience is poor, it can lead to a cascade of negative impacts, such as decreased appetite, malnutrition, weight loss, depression and loneliness.

“Having that social interaction and limiting self-isolation is very important,” said Chelsey Peterson, administrative director of nursing for The Legacy Living and Rehabilitation Center of Campbell County Health. “Nutrition is very important – it’s the fuel that feeds your body. There are a lot of unintended consequences that can occur later in life when your body is not operating at its full capacity.”

The Legacy Living and Rehabilitation Center experienced low resident satisfaction with its meals and meal service, primarily because the nutrition and nursing services departments were having difficulty serving food on time and keeping the meals hot. To reverse the situation, The Legacy created a team and embraced quality improvement tools and methodologies to make positive changes.

Creating a team and finding the gaps

To make big changes, you must have a strong team, and that’s exactly what was created. The Legacy built a team that included the CEO and CFO as project sponsors, directors and vice presidents as champions, project team leads, detailed the roles of the primary staff involved and named a Kaizen leader. The Kaizen leader is a leadership philosophy; they help drive the continuous improvement processes. Kaizen is a Japanese word that means “change for the better.”

“Before you can change something, you have to know the gaps that are currently present and ensure the goals are aligned with the strategic plan for the organization,” said Jonni Belden, nursing home administrator.

The team collected data for 30 days, including breakfast, lunch and dinner services. They utilized consistent staff to ensure that the data was accurate. They also obtained and analyzed

resident satisfaction scores. Staff also elicited comments and concerns during their rounds and sought feedback from the resident council and the food committee.

Using the captured data, the team then completed a gap analysis to identify problem areas and the gaps that caused negative outcomes. Once the gaps and root causes were identified, the team had target areas to focus on making improvements. Next, they worked with a consultant from the nonprofit section of the Toyota Production System Support (TPSS) to identify current practices to prioritize and develop strategies for implementing changes.

Quality improvement tools and methodologies prove valuable

In conjunction with TPSS, The Legacy instituted a lean project utilizing lean principles, such as the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle method, Quality Assurance and Process Improvement (QAPI) principles and applied a team approach to address issues. The team used the lean and quality tools of flowcharting, fishbone diagrams, brainstorming, prioritization, identification of waste (known as MUDA), PDSA, root cause analysis and development of measures.

The project involved numerous departments, including administration, facilities, food services, housekeeping, billing, nursing, quality and leadership staff. All of those players were involved in the design, leadership and development of the monitoring tools and feedback. Using the tools, the team then prioritized strategies, determined goals and created measures.

Measurements show success

Developing a system to monitor the data was important for all of the staff to be able to see the changes, performance trends and if the new changes were working. The team put systems in place to monitor care and services, drawing data from multiple sources. They also actively incorporated input from staff, residents, families and others as appropriate. If a change produced an unfavorable outcome, the team would make another change and test it again, repeating the process until the outcome was favorable.

“Performance improvement relies on the ability to say, ‘that did not work, let’s reevaluate and start again,’” said Belden. “Our team was very engaged, and our staff continues to see the benefit of the changes.”

At the end of the process, the data showed significant improvements to the team’s targeted goals. They reduced the meal serving time from an average of 72 minutes to 30 minutes. The resident satisfaction scores also improved dramatically from 15.6 percent to 50 percent.

Downstream improvements introduced

The team's initiative also created several other positive improvements at the facility outside of their targeted goals. The project standardized communication and workflows, simplified order taking and improved overall teamwork. The training and orientation of new staff is now consistent, and the overall courtesy of the staff has improved. As well, the project led to reduced staff turnover and overtime pay.

"It is important to note that our staff continues to see the value in this project," said Lisa Miller, nutrition therapy manager. "Communication is improved, teamwork and employee engagement has been positive and the services we provide for residents who are not in the dining room is not interrupted."

Positive reinforcement, strong role models and listening to staff, residents and their families were all attributes that helped the team succeed.

"Listening to the staff who are doing the work is essential to ensuring the new process is integrated into their daily routine," said Belden. "Communicating the 'why's' beyond the data, behind any performance improvement project, is one of the most effective tools I have found to hardwire change."

Some of the lessons learned from this project were:

- take the time to understand the problem before initiating a solution or strategy
- engage the frontline staff (they really want to do a good job and have great ideas)
- involve the residents and their families (communicating strategies is important)
- be prepared to look deeply and act quickly
- don't be afraid to fail
- don't be satisfied with initial results (continue to drive the satisfaction higher)
- be patient and communicate because learning new behaviors requires a lot of coaching and encouragement
- have courageous conversations in a respectful manner
- have a role model for staff (it will go a long way to having engaged staff who are implementing the new processes)
- engage leadership and ensure they are aligned with the strategic goals of the organization
- have leadership communicate the expectations and mission in a proactive, positive manner

If interested in learning more about this project, please contact Chelsey Peterson at Chelsey.Peterson@CCHWYO.ORG

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