Implementing Daily Management System Huddle Boards to Improve Communication Across Satellite Laboratories

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In a laboratory setting with fast-paced changes and heavy demands on staff, day-to-day communication across departments is challenging, yet paramount to resource sharing and real-time problem solving. Children’s Mercy Hospital Kansas City (CMH) has implemented system-wide lean practices focused on clinical and operational excellence. Our laboratory mission, or foundational elements and report on the following daily readiness objectives:

1. MESS: Methods, Equipment, Supplies, and Staffing (displayed as green or red)
2. Situation Awareness Notifications (abnormalities that need special attention that day)
3. Recognition (employees who go above and beyond contributions from previous day)
4. Announcements (department or institutional changes taking place that day)
5. Daily Workload (reported in patient volumes and previous day test volume)
6. Quick Hits and Big issues (problem solving: QH completed within 3 days/check-in dates for each)

A multi-tiered system would include huddle boards from individual department levels (i.e. Chemistry, Microbiology, or satellite department). One overall board for the lab (picture below), and the hospital as a whole. Each tier would report up to the next tier daily at the same time. Huddles are kept to five minutes or less.

Huddles allow for quick communication and decision making from department leaders to influence processes and resources. CMS allows departments to identify MESS red/green thresholds that affect patient care. All information should be displayed in a simple, clear format where any employee walking by would understand how patient care is being delivered for that day. All huddle boards are dry erase for easy documentation and use red/green magnets to identify abnormalities “at a glance.” Huddles take place at the beginning of each shift with all stakeholders present to ensure clear communication between staffing changes.

Departments are required to identify abnormalities as red/green thresholds that affect patient care. This is required breaking down testing platforms, staffing matrices, and supply and inventory par volumes to ensure continual and efficient patient care. Any downtime, critical staffing level, or backlog that can cause delays in testing should be reported red for the day. Metrics are department goals that are critical for care management and can be measured as they progress. This can include mandatory education for staffing or employee vaccination compliance.

Problem solving is a daily occurrence. These issues are documented as “Quick Hits” (being completed within the department in three days or less) or “Big Issues” (taking additional time, resources, or possibly external departments). Each problem is assigned a lead and given a due date to report back. Progress is reviewed during huddles and documented using Harvey Balls showing progress. These sheets can be used to show inspectors documentation of issues resolved in the department.

Every department is required to identify situations that could cause delays in patient care. This can include, but is not limited to, IT downtime, courier delays, weather concerns, construction, or surges in patient volume. This information is followed up with Announcements and Employee Recognition.

Metrics provide visual content to continual improvement. Metrics are also included in daily reporting, focusing on Safety, Employment, Delivery of Services, and Stewards of Resources. These metrics must be measurable, contribute to improved patient care, employee engagement, operational and clinical excellence. These metrics should be department specific, timely, and patient centered.

Conclusion

The Daily Management System has allowed for improved communication between shift exchange and departments throughout the hospital. The standardized process empowers frontline employees to identify abnormalities in staffing and equipment, resolution of issues, and efficiencies in process improvement. This bottom-up approach aligns with the True North mission allowing employees to become engaged and more solution-driven.

Health systems with multiple satellite locations are able to connect via telecommunication technology, allowing for real-time reporting and deployment of resources. This ensures optimal utilization of resources that can be reallocated based on volume drivers within the department. Aligning department readiness and metrics with patient outcomes daily helps build a highly reliable organization focused on continuous improvement.

In this continuously changing healthcare environment, institutions must become more efficient with limited resources, focused on clinical improvement, and encouraging staff to break down barriers. CMS is an effective lean tool for organizations wanting to break down silos, improve communication between departments, and strive towards clinical and operational excellence.

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