

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT IN HEALTH CARE

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ABSTRACT

Quality of care is one of the most frequently quoted principles of health policy, and it is currently high up on the agenda of policy-makers at national, European and international levels. At the national level, addressing the issue of healthcare quality may be motivated by various reasons – ranging from a general commitment to high-quality healthcare provision as a public good or the renewed focus on patient outcomes in the context of popular value-based healthcare ideas to the identification of specific healthcare quality problems. When healthcare leaders set goals for their organizations, such as preventing patient falls, or a medical system aims to lower opioid use after surgery, they use a process called quality improvement. “Quality improvement is the systematic approach that is guided by data to improve the quality and safety of healthcare delivery,” “Quality improvement focuses on care that is safe, timely, effective, efficient, equitable and patient-centered.” Improving healthcare quality and safety is a growing focus for the nursing field and healthcare systems as a whole, as medical institutions aim to achieve efficiency, reduce healthcare costs and ensure high-quality patient outcomes.

DEFINITION

Quality improvement (QI) consists of systematic and continuous actions that lead to measurable improvement in health care services and the health status of targeted patient groups.

It is also defined as the combined and unceasing efforts of everyone - healthcare professionals, patients and their families, researchers, payers, planners and educators - to make the changes that will lead to better patient outcomes (health), better system performance (care) and better professional development

Why Quality Improvement in Healthcare is Important?

In the world where evolution of technology is on the peak, medical science is also seeing innumerable advances. But, when it comes to addressing patient needs, ensuring patient safety, efficiency of the system, and quality improvement, healthcare system performs far below acceptable levels.

We have only seen the medical environment where physicians rely primarily on the traditional practice of using pen-paper, memory, and few extra efforts to improve the care given to patients. However, our medical environment requires deliberate redesigning for reliable, cost-effective and sustained quality improvement in healthcare system.

- 1) Quality improvement is meant for enhancing safety, effectiveness, and efficiency. So, redesigning healthcare system requires indulgence in specialized methods and tools known to assist improvement.
- 2) Simple and intuitive electronic medical records software such as Patient Care Electronic Health Record gives user-centric design to doctor's offices or hospitals.
- 3) This tool helps hospitals to get more reliable and efficient in the healthcare process and devote more time to satisfactory healthcare services.

How quality improvement in healthcare system will accelerate the performance

Quality improvement in healthcare means a systematic approach by a healthcare organization that monitors, assesses and improves the standards of quality healthcare. The organizational chain of activities is cyclic and needs continuous improvement to seek a higher level of performance. Continuous upgradation in healthcare activities can pull out healthcare organizations from inefficient traditional concepts and utilize technology/tools to perform efficiently and hence generate better quality results.

Step by step adoption of proven efficiency & improved methodologies implemented in healthcare systems such as Practice Management System, Patient Engagement

and Care Coordination Software makes healthcare processes more efficient, simple and streamlined.

Principles of quality improvement in healthcare system

Quality improvement is directly related to the service delivery approach, level of patient satisfaction, efficiency and outcome. A successful program always incorporates principles of quality improvement to achieve an enhanced level of performance and a successful organizational healthcare system. Here are four key principals that the healthcare systems can consider for quality improvement:

1. Work as Systems and Processes – An organization needs to understand its own delivery system and key processes, rather than considering it as small and simple or big and complex. The key to the quality improvement approach in any size of an organization should be, to streamline “Input – Process – Output” to meet the needs of a specific organization’s health service delivery system.

2. Focus on Patient – The major concept behind the quality improvement in healthcare is to get the patient’s needs and expectations on the same page. Services that are designed to bring needs and expectations together include.

- Patient Safety
- Patient Engagement
- Systems that support patient access
- Evidence-based care provision
- Patient-centered communication
- Health literacy of patients

3. Focus on the use of data – Data is the cornerstone of quality improvement. It describes how current systems are working, tracks the changes, allows comparison and monitoring for sustainable improvements. Data-driven insights deliver better outcomes, minimum variation, fewer re-admissions, lower infection rates, and fewer medical errors. Both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection are used to improve the quality of the healthcare system.

4. Focus on Care-coordination – It is the coordination of care activities. Care coordination software maintains the Master Patient Index and Longitudinal Health Record for each patient (It becomes very effective if it is a case of a chronic condition). It helps reduce care fragmentation of a patient, by providing a secure network of trusted healthcare providers and ensure effective referrals and smooth transitions between two or more healthcare providers.

Benefits of Quality Improvement in Healthcare System

1. Safe: Systematic and organized approach is intended towards optimizing care for the patients it serves and avoids harm. It embraces a culture of safety, quality, and transparency.
2. Effective: By improving the ‘process’, an organization reduces the chances associated with failure and redundancy. The improved healthcare

system is more on data-driven science rather than anecdote-driven.

3. Patient-centered: Improved efficiency of managerial and clinical processes leaves transition space for doctors and staff to provides responsive, respectful and value-based care to a patient.
4. Proactive: Improved processes recognize and solve the problems even before they occur.
5. Cost-effective: Quality improvement processes are budget neutral. It avoids the cost associated with process failure, poor outcomes, and errors. Reliable and streamlined processes are less expensive to maintain.
6. Efficient: Improving process makes wasteful activities associated with equipment, supplies, ideas, and energy more obvious and makes it easier to eliminate.

TIP TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY IN HEALTH CARE

The following tips may aid you in your healthcare improvement efforts.

1) Analyse your data and outcomes

As Peter Drucker, said, “If you cannot measure it, you cannot manage it.” Before you can begin to make improvements in health care, you first need to know what opportunities exist for improvement and then establish baseline outcomes. Next, look at trends and statistics from electronic health records, outcomes studies, and other data source to identify key areas in need of improvement.

2) Set goals

According to the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI), healthcare should be.

- ✓ **Safe:** Avoid injuries to patients from the care that is intended to help them.
- ✓ **Effective:** Match care to science; avoid overuse of ineffective care and underuse of effective care.
- ✓ **Patient-Centered:** Honor the individual and respect choice.
- ✓ **Timely:** Reduce waiting for both patients and those who give care.
- ✓ **Efficient:** Reduce waste.
- ✓ **Equitable:** Close racial and ethnic gaps in health status.

3) Create a balanced team

An effective team should be comprised of members from different backgrounds, with varied skills and experience levels. According to the IHI, forming a balanced team is one of the primary steps in the improvement process. The team should include a senior leader who can advise, provide oversight, and advocate for the team; a clinical expert who has the background necessary to make informed clinical decisions; and a project manager who can accomplish day-to-day tasks and keep the team on track.

4) Include Human Factors Inputs

Human factors is a body of knowledge about human abilities, human limitations, and other characteristics that are relevant to design. Human factors engineering is the application of human factors information to the design of tools, machines, systems, tasks, jobs, and environments for safe, comfortable, and effective human use. These relate closely to quality improvement.

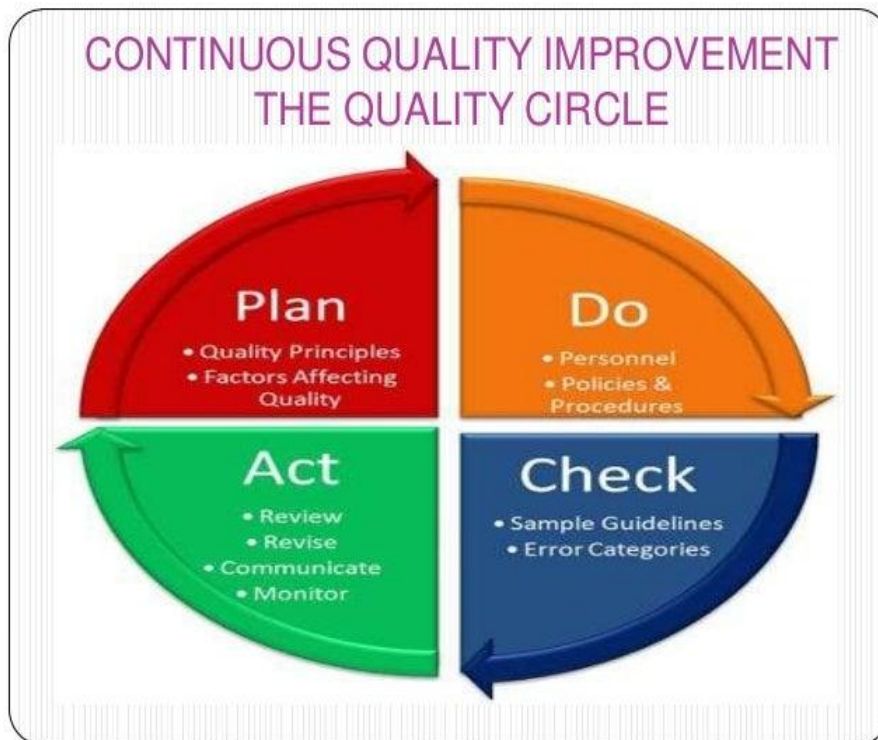
Some key human factors principles include avoiding reliance on memory, standardizing procedures, and using protocols and checklists. According to the National Center for Human Factors in Healthcare, consideration of human factors in the design of healthcare systems and processes has many benefits, including more efficient care processes, enhanced communication between medical providers, better understanding of a patient's medical condition, reduced risk of medical device and health IT-related errors, improved patient outcomes, and cost-savings.

5) Create an executable plan

To accomplish your goals in a timely and effective manner, you must create an achievable improvement plan. This includes specific measures, protocols for attaining those measurements, and specific definitions for improvement which will be taken from your goal setting and data analysis work. Be sure to have an organized system for tracking your data and measurements.

6) Become Familiar with the PDSA cycle

According to IHI, the model, developed by Associates in Process Improvement, is "a simple, yet powerful tool for accelerating improvement." The core of the model is the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle, to test quality or improvement-related changes in clinical settings. By planning then enacting a change, observing results, and then acting on what is learned, one is able to discern which changes are effective. This cycle essentially mimics the steps of the scientific method, but is adapted for action-oriented learning.



7) Communicate goals and progress

Once your plan is underway, be sure to communicate with your team and with your organization at large. Share milestones both large and small as well as setbacks. Congratulate those who have contributed and made an impact on your progress. Your plan is more likely to succeed when staff are engaged.

8) Research other organizations and collaborate

Research online and in the literature, and reach out to see if you can learn from their quality improvement programs. Most organizations are open to sharing this information for the greater good of patients.

CONCLUSION

Overall improving the quality and performance in the healthcare environment can help providers with reliable, cost-effective and sustained healthcare processes and enable them to achieve their goal of improving care delivery and enhancing patient outcomes. On the front line, it all starts with healthcare service providers to get adopted to the environment where quality improvement comes first rather than the process outcomes. Let's get started with quality improvement in healthcare system.

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