

Galway Hospital Pharmacy - Lean in

The hospital pharmacy team at University Hospital Galway had a very different challenge last year - thinking of new ways to improve pharmacy performance despite a recruitment embargo: Hospital Pharmacy News looks at their innovation in more detail.

The pharmacy department with the strong support of the teaching hospital was under significant pressure to perform more work with less staff. A recruitment embargo and the absence of an assistant grade of staff in dispensing operations meant the pharmacy team must respond to acute and non-acute patient needs without having an optimal skills mix.

The hospital pharmacy developed the capacity of the pharmacy team to solve problems and implement solutions within these constraints by using Lean thinking.

"Several important process improvements have been identified and realised. We could not have done this without the Leading Edge Group consultant's professionalism, intelligence and enthusiasm," says Peter Kidd, Chief 2 Pharmacist, Clinical Services.

Prior experience with implementing Lean thinking had convinced the hospital's Chief Pharmacist that introducing Lean tools and concepts to the pharmacy team would empower them to make ongoing improvements despite the constraints within which they work.

A Leading Edge Group consultant was appointed to deliver a tailored programme of training and mentoring to 10-12 hospital pharmacy team members, primarily pharmacy technicians and pharmacists.

Stepping out of the classroom

The key outcomes achieved were empowered staff, improved customer focus, better stock management, better workflow



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and better space utilisation. Pharmacy team members have made process improvement an ongoing part of their routine work.

The team members have also spoken to their customers to get a better understanding of the needs, expectations and experiences of both patients and hospital staff in other departments to ensure greater visibility of stock and almost eliminate stock-outs of key stock items. Work processes have been mapped and unnecessary movement of people and transportation of products have been eliminated. A re-organised, tidier and more visual work environment has created space savings of 25%.

In addition, the team have developed the knowledge, skills and confidence to lead process improvement work on an ongoing basis and have a better understanding of the needs, expectations and experiences of both patients and hospital staff in other departments. Says Peter: "We can now manage stock more effectively, with greater visibility of stock and less stock-outs and have improved workflow by reducing the movement of staff and transportation of products.

In addition we were able to utilise our pharmacy space more effectively."

The project was characterised by:

- Taking learning out of the classroom – relating Lean concepts to the everyday work of pharmacy team members.
- Walking the process – going to where each step of a process happens and talking to “customers” about their experiences and needs.
- Learning by doing – developing team knowledge of Lean

techniques by implementing improvement projects in the hospital pharmacy.

Walking the process

Techniques used in the project included:

- Prompting conversations about staff opinions and anxieties.
- Implementing an ideas board and establishing daily ten minute improvement meetings.
- Mapping key team processes.
- Facilitating a site visit to another organisation to see Lean in action.
- Mentoring team members as they planned and executed projects to achieve a tidier, safer work environment and better stock management.

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The pharmacy team at Galway University Hospital

