Rapid Cycle Improvement: Controlling change

2) What changes can we make to result in an improvement? 3) How will we know an improvement has been made? These questions will assist the team in maintaining focus on the desired improvement.

When deciding what you want to accomplish, first consider established guidelines and current performance. Using information that is already being collected can give an idea of baseline performance. If information is not already being collected, just enough concurrent data collection should be conducted to determine whether accepted standards are being met. Looking at a small population in this way through Rapid Cycle helps put the focus on reducing failure rates rather than just improving performance. For example, examine the discharge records of patients with myocardial infarction for a month to determine whether beta-blockers were prescribed to patients who did not have contraindications. This data will allow a comparison of practice to the accepted standard.

A team approach, including all those involved in the process, helps to determine what process changes can lead to improvement. When considering strategies, the team makes changes that team members predict will result in improvement. These can include clarifying procedures, revising protocols, educating staff, or using a new form. A Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle can help execute and test the change.

FIGURE 1

Shewhart Cycle: PDSA

PLAN: based on theory/prediction

ACT:

adopt
adapt
abandon

DO:
small
scale

STUDY:
to learn
improvement, apply it on a small scale. If the desired improvement results, apply the change to a larger population to test for continued improvement.

For example, test a new process for administration of preoperative antibiotics to one orthopedic physician’s patients for one week. This allows the team to test changes and make adjustments before affecting a large group. It also helps build team members’ confidence in the improvement process because they see immediate results. If successful, the change could then be applied to all orthopedic physicians or more than one surgical procedure.

The team will know if the changes resulted in improvement through concurrent measurement. Performing 100% review is not necessary to determine whether improvement has been made. The focus is on the improvement, not the measurement. If all those involved in the process are represented on the team, data collection is usually less complicated than one might assume. Informing staff and senior leaders about the measurements and progress quickly, instead of after 3 or 6 months of data collection, will help gain support for efforts to rapidly improve processes.

Rapid cycle improvement can quickly create an environment that promotes excellence. It encourages health care professionals to actively work toward and meet the highest standards of care and to stay ahead of an ever-changing environment. Excellence in care not only improves outcomes but also builds consumer confidence in those providing the care. A quick comparison of traditional and rapid cycle quality improvement can be seen in Figure 3.

For more information about rapid cycle improvement or other quality improvement issues, call AFMC at (501) 375-5700.

Pamela Brown is the inpatient project manager for the Arkansas Foundation for Medical Care.

Deborah Hare is director of quality management for White County Medical Center in Searcy.

References: