Using Lean Methods to Improve Surgical Instrument Processing

Joint Commission Resources, in the lead article of the March 2013 issue of The Joint Commission Journal on Quality and Patient Safety, offers “Applying Lean Methods to Improve Quality and Safety in Surgical Sterile Instrument Processing,” C. Craig Blackmore, MD, MPH, and his co-authors at Virginia Mason Medical Center in Seattle, Wash. describe how their hospital reduced the occurrence of surgical instrument processing errors from 3 percent of their total surgical cases to 1.5 percent during a 37-month period.

The article demonstrates how a healthcare organization that is committed to using Lean methodology can significantly reduce its surgical instrument processing errors, and as a result potentially create meaningful improvements in infection rates, surgical errors, and costs.

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