Reconnecting the “Why” of Health Care Daily Management Systems

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“The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why.” Although this quote from Mark Twain refers to the pursuit of individual enlightenment, it is just as relevant to employees’ understanding of how their contribution to the workplace contributes to organizational purpose.

When individuals at all levels of an organization understand how their work contributes to the organization’s mission, their engagement in their work increases and their performance improves. To this end, leaders are responsible for messaging the mission in a way that resonates with every member of the organization. One strategy for continuously delivering and sustaining this message is the use of daily management systems (DMSes), huddles and visual management (huddle) boards.

“Daily management” refers to a continuous process that ensures that work is done in the right way and at the right time in order to achieve the organization’s strategic objectives. A DMS facilitates routine monitoring of actions, allowing individuals to quickly and routinely verify that the expected results are being achieved and, if necessary, develop corrective measures if targets are not being hit. Key components of a DMS include leadership standard work, visual controls and a daily accountability process.

Given the success of DMSes, huddles and visual huddle boards in other industries, health care systems have begun to adopt and adapt them to facilitate daily discussions around process improvement and to empower staff at all levels to course-correct when performance is off track.

More and more hospital leaders recognize these tools as foundational for creating and maintaining a culture of continuous improvement. A key challenge they face, however, is how to sustain the core practices in a meaningful way. For example, it’s possible that in any given work unit, despite regular team huddles and recording of performance metrics on a visual display, quality problems and low engagement persist. One reason may be that the DMS has become another item requested by administration, rather than being understood as a means to achieve a collective mission. Further, it is likely that the DMS was not implemented correctly when it was initially rolled out. In their haste to implement best practices and recommended tactics, even experienced leaders forget to connect the tools and practices to the “why” of the organization.

To be optimally effective, these tools should be introduced in such a way that they are not viewed by staff as just another task on a to-do list, but rather, as a system to maintain awareness of how everyone collectively is progressing toward performance excellence.

Initial implementation of an effective DMS, as well as its sustained effectiveness over time, hinges on the degree to which the organization’s true north aligns with the mission that guides the daily management system. In other words, “Why does this matter?”

AT A GLANCE

- In the first of a two-part series, Press Ganey consultants address the importance of connecting daily management systems, huddles and visual huddle boards to organizational mission.
- Daily management systems, when implemented properly, allow employees at every level of an organization to understand how their daily activity contributes to the goals of the organization.
- To be optimally effective, these tools should be introduced in such a way that they are not viewed by staff as just another task on a to-do list, but rather, as a system to maintain awareness of how everyone collectively is progressing toward performance excellence.
A DMS is not the end in itself. In fact, it is one mechanism among many designed to support continuous improvement and the alignment of strategy with organizational mission.

As one hospital physician leader appropriately observed, “Daily management systems are designed so that problems can be quickly identified, front-line staff are empowered to fix the problems that they can, and problems that the front-line staff cannot fix are escalated and countermeasures created quickly.”


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