

Leading pediatric hospital reduces laboratory turnaround times to improve patient experience

One of the nation's top ranked pediatric hospitals wanted to improve its lab service delivery to provide an unsurpassed level of care to its patients. Each year the hospital accepts approximately 25,000 inpatient admissions, 80,000 visits to its ED, and more than a million outpatient visits. Many of these patients require laboratory testing which is provided by the Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine.



Even though it ran an impressive 300-person lab operation, it was apparent that improvement opportunities, once identified and implemented, would have an immediate positive impact on the patient experience and the organization's bottom line. With the stated goal of reducing laboratory turnaround time for specimen processing, the hospital embarked on a competitive review to find a qualified outside resource to help it accomplish its objective.

Key Metrics

Turnaround times for "routine" priority specimens reduced by over 40%

Turnaround times for "stat" priority processing dropped by more than 20%

ED credited Lab for its improved customer service performance

After considering a number of consulting firms, the hospital selected USC Consulting Group (USCCG), an operations management firm well known for its world-class operations management practice. "In the end, USCCG seemed to offer the most comprehensive insight into our situation. We were particularly impressed with their ability to apply Lean operations methodologies and techniques, proven successful in the manufacturing sector, to the hospital environment," said the

Administrative Director of the Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine.

But USCCG's assignment went far beyond just using Lean principles to reduce laboratory cycle times and costs. It included the implementation of a comprehensive management operating system to enable the hospital to capture performance data and provide it tools to actively manage and, if need be, redress any identified operational shortcomings. "We had very outdated, ineffective systems in place," said the Chair of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine. "It was easy to

get lab results and basic reports, but we could not get the information we really needed, such as analysis that showed us how we were doing in terms of turnaround time and productivity throughout the course of a day.”

Once on board, the consultants performed a detailed review of existing information flows and processes across the laboratory. USCCG team members worked alongside laboratory management to obtain a more in-depth understanding of processes and methodologies. Their objective was to identify opportunities to drive improvements in productivity and throughput that would favorably impact the patient experience by cutting wait time in the ED, reducing inpatient discharge cycle time and, generally, improving the speed, quality, accuracy and reliability of test results.

The team identified and eliminated nonvalue-adding activities; prototyped, installed, and standardized best practices; defined and put into place measurement and reporting systems and parameters for key performance metrics plus enabling technology to deliver actionable business intelligence to decision makers. USCCG’s LINCS® Lean Information Control System brought visibility to data long locked away in the hospital’s information system, enabling fact-based decisions in management priority and corrective action.

The new lab management operating system created new disciplines for the entire team. Hospital staff and management were greatly impressed with the depth to which they were able to illustrate opportunities in specimen processing, operational intelligence solutions, and organizational capability.

As a result of process improvements and the new management operating system, turnaround times for “routine” priority specimens were reduced by 40% while those for “stat” specimens dropped by more than 20%. The implementation phase included delivery of Lean transformation training for the lab management team, systems for resolving demand variations, and changes to the physical layout of the lab to streamline operations and support a single piece flow.

Summing up the engagement, the Laboratory Medicine Chairman, said, “The project’s greatest achievement was creating a united leadership team. The amount of positive change created over the A&D and project phases was simply amazing.”

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Laboratory Medicine
Chairman,
Pediatric Hospital



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