A Leadership Initiative to Improve Communication and Enhance Safety

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As an organization, we are focusing on Safety practices that make us more reliable and reduce the incidence of preventable harm.

Communication breakdown is directly related to patient safety in hospitals and is often the root cause of significant errors.

The EMPOWER project was a collaborative effort to promote a culture of patient safety in an acute hospital through an interdisciplinary leadership driven communication program. Applying lessons learned from the aviation industry, significant reductions in adverse outcomes can be achieved in health care through the application of Crew Resource Management (CRM) techniques.

Key components of CRM include leadership commitment to the empowerment of all team members, the reduction of hierarchy, and the use of open, structured communication.

The application of CRM tools reduces human error through support of improved communication and teamwork. The EMPOWER project was designed to prepare paraprofessional staff to communicate changes in patient status using the SBAR (situation, background, assessment, recommendation) structural communication tool.

Specific project goals included reduction of cultural and educational barriers to interdisciplinary communication and the translation of SBAR techniques for use with all team members.

SBAR was initially used as a handoff model for communication on submarines and has been successfully used across diverse population in health care.

Results of this project indicate a change in the use of SBAR throughout the institution and improvement in communication among team members. Subsequent to this work, the organization has committed to the journey to become a Highly Reliable Organization.

Lessons learned from this project can be translated for use by other industries where safety is a primary focus.

**Keywords:** Safety culture, structured communication, empowerment