

## An improvement methodology to support value-based care and a culture of continuous improvement

The transition to value-based care is still in its infancy, yet many consumers have already seen dramatic shifts in the way healthcare is delivered compared with those who have yet to take the leap. A stimulus for these changes is a combination of unsustainable healthcare expenditures, higher than acceptable rates of healthcare-associated harm, low consumer experience and burnout in clinicians. The focus on improving our system is entirely appropriate and essential to the vitality of the generations of today and tomorrow. There is demand on health care organizations across the ecosystem to improve their performance in an efficient, yet sustainable way.

### BUILDING A CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT CULTURE AT BEATRICE COMMUNITY HEALTH

Irrelevant of the setting, healthcare leaders and caregivers face many challenges that make the path to excellence difficult. Those in the rural setting typically face dire situations with nearly [50%](#) of rural hospitals facing negative financial margins. Despite, Beatrice Community Health (BCH) has proven the concept that good use of analytics and process improvement directly supports a culture of continuous improvement that drives population health and supports the transition to value-based care.

In Summer 2019, BCH enrolled their leadership team in a Lean Six Sigma training program to establish a consistent approach to improvement across the system. The Lean Six Sigma methodology is a fact-based, data-driven philosophy that drives consumer satisfaction and bottom-line results by reducing variation, waste and cycle time. At a high-level it consists of the following five phases:



The training employed a “learn by doing” program structure. Participants engaged in classroom sessions to be made aware of the concepts while in parallel, applied their learnings with leading an improvement project. This structure maximized retention and allowed participants to receive timely feedback from peers and coaches to refine their skills. Based on the strategic priorities, six projects were carefully chosen for the participants to lead. The projects focused on different service areas across the system. Although, the work and goals of the projects did not directly impact one another, there were commonalities discovered across all projects.

**Leadership means ownership.** During an improvement project, there is significant collaboration from the team. While every team member has an important role to the project, one is critical to the success of the entire project: leadership. In BCH, they have created the opportunity for expediting improvements by taking their own leadership through the training; walking the walk. While the participants have been the only ones to lead with this new methodology, the first-hand experience and learnings have set each leader up to be a strong coach as they they work to spread the culture.

**Data drives understanding.** The BCH team also found there to be considerable data challenges to overcome before being able to widely implement. Being data-driven is inevitably a critical factor in a culture of continuous improvement – because an organization must first be a data-driven organization before it can be an improvement organization.

**Iterative is the way.** With a proven improvement methodology and analytics in place, the BCH team quickly learned whether the countermeasures they were implementing achieved the desired outcomes. The concept of PDSA, while easy to understand is not always easy to deploy systemically. With PDSA as the foundation and analytics as the fuel, performance levels were improved in a meaningful way.



The BCH Lean Six Sigma training was designed to develop staff to lead the organization to a culture of continuous improvement. Beyond the primary objective of developing improvement science skills and organizational capacity for change, the BCH team was able to document standard improvement practices, develop structured processes for how to manage a project throughout its lifecycle, change the perception of improvement and improve services, including these highlights:

- **Decreased average cardiovascular sleep study turnaround times from 12.3 to 8.5 days.**
- **Improved accuracy rate of patient consent forms from 2% to 99%.**
- **Decreased clinical supply inventory, resulting in \$7,000 in cost prevention annually.**

Creating a culture of continuous improvement is not possible without an appropriately oriented management system that uses a structured, data-driven approach to improving operations. Management and improvement processes are complex. Crafting a system that leverages this complexity has challenged health organizations, especially those in resource-strapped environments like rural settings. This case study provides evidence that investment in your people and supportive analytics can help you build a culture conducive of excellence. Visit [www.kpininja.com](http://www.kpininja.com) to learn more.