Saskatchewan Health Care Management System

Key messages

- Our current system does not work nearly as well as it could or needs to. We know from a variety of sources (Patient First Review, CIHI reports, patient experience surveying, and performance metrics on Quality Insight), that we are not serving patients as well as we should.

- We are committed, as a system, to using Lean methodology to ensure the care we deliver is compassionate and patient- and family centred, with no harm to patients and no waiting.

- Lean is a set of operating philosophies and methods that help create maximum value for patients by reducing waste including the waste of time waiting for service.

- Saskatchewan is the first jurisdiction in the world to apply Lean at a provincial scale, across a variety of health care settings.

- Virginia Mason, Thedacare, Seattle Children’s Hospital are among the more well-known health systems that are consistently showing that application of Lean tools and principles results in shorter waits, fewer defects, more satisfied patients and staff, and better financial performance.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

General

Why are we using Lean? What is the need for change?
Our current system does not work nearly as well as it could or needs to. We know from a variety of sources (Patient First Review, CIHI reports, patient experience surveying, and performance metrics on Quality Insight), that we are not serving patients as well as we should. While we have been on an improvement journey in this province for more than 10 years, our system is still not as safe as it must be. Staff believe they are working as hard as they can and many are optimistic that working differently will result in better care. Historical increases in health budgets have not yielded dramatically better care. Clearly, our old top-down approach, where we depended on our leaders for all the answers, is not working. Lean engages and empowers team members to bring forward and implement solutions that result in better patient care. Lean provides the tools to examine our processes to determine what adds value in the eyes of the patients we serve.
What is the overarching goal of the changes underway in our health system?
We want to transform Saskatchewan’s health care system into world-class system that consistently delivers the quality of care you’d want for a family member, friend, or yourself.

What is our shared vision for health care in Saskatchewan?
As a province, our vision is healthy people, healthy communities. Specifically our aspiration for health care in Saskatchewan is to deliver care that is compassionate and patient- and family-centred, with no harm to patients and no waiting. And we want a culture in health care where we’re constantly learning and improving.

Lean

What is Lean?
Lean is a set of operating philosophies and methods that help create maximum value for patients by reducing waste including the waste of time waiting for service. It is often referred to as a learning and management system. Lean

- Eliminates “wastes” or lack of efficiency in processes, such as patients waiting, duplicating tests or multiple forms requiring the same information, or staff time spent searching for supplies.
- Eliminates defects – which include errors such as harm to patients – and opportunities for defects that could lead to patient (and staff) harm or dissatisfaction;
- Removes activity that doesn’t add value as perceived by our patients; and,

Applied correctly, Lean is not about cutting jobs. That said, Lean is based on the premise that we can continuously improve health care without adding more money, staff, space, or inventory.

What do you see in an organization that embraces Lean?

- Leadership is a vital success factor
- Leaders regularly going to where the work is done (Gemba) to see and learn; asking questions and listening to those closest to the work for their ideas on how to make improvements; and removing the barriers to improving
- Respect for those who do the work and acknowledgement of their expertise and wisdom
- A lot of “try storming” – test an idea on a small scale and learn.
- Failures are treated as opportunities to learn – also known as “Fail Forward Fast”
- Standard Work – by documenting in writing the steps involved in work, everyone know what is expected of them. If there is no standard, then there can be no improvement.
- Everyone is empowered to “stop the line” to prevent mistakes and mistake proof processes to eliminate defects.
• Attack the process not the people
• Get to root cause

We don’t make cars. How does this apply to health care?
Just like cars on a moving assembly line, patients should experience a smooth flow from one process to the next in their care experience. When we look at the patient’s journey as they make appointments, see their caregiver, get a test or medication, and get surgery or treatment, our goal is to eliminate waiting, miscommunication, duplicate work and confusion. At every step in the journey, care givers should have all the equipment, information and supplies they need to deliver care. This will result in higher quality results and a more satisfying experience for the patient and caregiver.

What is the proof that Lean works in health care?
Virginia Mason, Thedacare, Seattle Children’s Hospital are among the more well-known health systems that are consistently showing that application of Lean tools and principles results in shorter waits, fewer defects, more satisfied patients and staff, and better financial performance. We know from our own experience with the ward-based program Releasing Time to Care™ here in Saskatchewan (which incorporated many Lean principles and methods) that this approach can improve patient experience, staff engagement, and reduce waste.

John Black and Associates (JBA)

Who are John Black and Associates (JBA)?
John Black and Associates is a Seattle-based consultancy group that has helped a number of other North American health care systems (including Virginia Mason and Park Nicollet) implement Lean management. With the support of JBA, these other systems have become more patient- and family-centred, with fewer defects and less waiting. John Black and his senior team have over 200 years combined experience implementing Lean in health care.

Why did the province hire John Black and Associates (JBA)?
Seniors leaders from across our health system travelled to Seattle in June 2011 to witness firsthand the difference that Lean has made at Virginia Mason Medical Centre. John Black and Associates worked closely with that system to help them develop their Virginia Mason Production System using Lean principles.

That trip ignited the province’s interest in Lean. After the visit, the Health Ministry initiated a request for proposal (RFP) process to identify a consultant to work with this province’s care
system. Three vendors were short-listed, with JBA ultimately selected based in large part on their extensive experience applying Lean to health care. A contract was signed with JBA in September 2012.

**What has Virginia Mason achieved through Lean?**

After 13 years implementing their production system, Virginia Mason was named a 2011 Top Hospital by The Leapfrog Group, a coalition of public and private purchasers of employee health coverage founded a decade ago to work for improvements in health care safety, quality and affordability. This is the sixth consecutive year Virginia Mason has received the honor from Leapfrog. Virginia Mason and University of Maryland Medical Center-Baltimore (UMMC) are the only two hospitals to receive Top Hospital distinction every year since the recognition program’s inception in 2006. In 2010, Virginia Mason and UMMC were also the only hospitals in the country to be named “Top Hospital of the Decade” by Leapfrog.

Healthgrades named Virginia Mason a Distinguished Hospital for Clinical Excellence™ in 2012. This prestigious distinction places Virginia Mason among the top 5 percent of hospitals nationwide for clinical performance. Additionally, Healthgrades awarded Virginia Mason’s Cardiac, Pulmonary, Neurosciences, Gastrointestinal, General Surgery and Critical Care programs with specialty Excellence Awards for 2013, placing them in the top 10 percent of hospitals nationwide.

The Chairman and CEO, Dr. Gary Kaplan continues to lead teams to Japan each year to carry on the study and application of the Toyota Production System, as part of their continued work to be the quality leader and transform health care in the world. The initial visits were led by John Black starting in 2002.

**Lean in Saskatchewan health care**

**What are the major elements of this change?**

*One improvement method:* Our health care system has adopted the principles and methods embodied in Lean (Toyota Production System) as our common approach for making health care better in this province. Committing to one methodology offers the opportunity for us all to learn together, so that we can think and act as one system.

*Training:* We are equipping more than 800 leaders and managers with in-depth knowledge about and the capability to apply Lean principles and methods, through a rigorous certification process called Lean Leader Training. This training takes about 70 days over the course of 18-24 months.
Continuous incremental improvement (kaizen): We are working to continually improve the way we organize and deliver care through a number of different improvement events, including Rapid Process Improvement Workshops (RPIWs), Kanban, 5S campaigns, and mistake-proofing projects as well as applying tools like daily visual management and standard work. (See JBA Glossary on SharePoint)

Learning from other high-performing systems: A key component of Lean training is visiting and learning from a few North American industries and health care systems that are very experienced in using Lean to deliver maximum value to their respective customers.

Creating a culture of continuous improvement: Lean is about creating a system where everyone -- clinicians, administrators, support staff, provincial agencies, patients and family members -- understand they have a role in identifying opportunities to make care safer and better, and that leadership’s role is to remove barriers to improvement.

What is the Saskatchewan Health Care Management System?
It is how we are taking the tools and principles of Lean and applying them to our unique local environment. The Saskatchewan Health Care Management System is our local, homegrown, “made in Saskatchewan” approach to building a world class health system. A world class system embraces and practices daily management, cross functional management and strategy deployment.

What is the significance of what we are doing with Lean?
Saskatchewan is the first jurisdiction in the world to apply Lean at a provincial scale, across a variety of health care settings. It is the first time that multiple organizations have come together to think, plan and act as one, in order to achieve the ambitious strategic goals of improving the care and health of the people, health care teams and the sustainability of our health care system.

How long will Lean take?
There is no end date – there will always be an opportunity to make care safer, timelier, more effective and more efficient. The investment in and application of Lean methodology is not a time-limited project, but rather a new way of managing and delivering health care, and a new way of relating to and working with patients as partners in their care.

We have learned from other systems that have adopted Lean that this change is a long-term journey. For example, Virginia Mason has made huge improvements since first adopting Lean in 2001, and they are still constantly working to become better.
How is the province using Lean to inform design of new facilities such as the Saskatchewan Children’s Hospital?

Health regions are working with John Black and Associates to apply 3P (production preparation process) methodology to all new capital projects. Through 3Ps, teams that include patients and families, staff and physicians, are ensuring that new care facilities are built around the needs of patients. Historically, facilities have often been designed to make things most convenient for health care providers.

Impact of Lean on people working in health care

What will this mean for me?

Patients, family members: Patients and families are being closely involved in Lean improvement efforts. Health regions are inviting them to add their important voice and perspective to improvement efforts, in particular during Rapid Process Improvement Workshops (RPIWs). We believe Saskatchewan is the first health system that is involving patients and family members in every Rapid Process Improvement Workshop and 3P.

Frontline staff: Frontline staff has a key role to play in identifying and fixing broken processes. They know the systems and processes best. Managers are regularly engaging frontline staff in conversations about how to improve care processes to improve things for patients. Once new processes have been created through improvement events, staff then use them to identify further opportunities for further improvements.

Physicians: Physicians, like other front-line staff, have a key role to play in identifying and fixing broken processes.

Managers: Managers are learning how to lead in a different way. In a Lean system, managers and leaders are no longer the only problem solvers, but rather have a critical role to play in removing barriers so that frontline staff can implement the solutions they identify. Supervisors are going to where the work is done/the care is delivered, to ask questions, to listen and to observe.

What is being done to involve Saskatchewan physicians in this major change?

Physicians are regularly participating in the Rapid Process Improvement Workshops being conducted in various health regions around the province. Some physician leaders are doing the full, 18-month Lean Leader Certification training. The province is developing a specific training program tailored to meet the unique needs and time constraints of front-line physicians, building on the experience of Park Nicollet health system in Minnesota.
Will people be laid off? Redeployed?
Senior leadership has committed to no loss of employment as a result of Lean. That said, some roles may change as we figure out the best ways to organize and deliver services to meet the needs of patients. We want people to participate in improvement events (e.g., Rapid Process Improvement Workshops) secure in the knowledge that they will not “improve” themselves out of a job.

Will my job change?
It is possible that your job could change. Changing how we’ve always done things to better meet the needs of patients may mean that health care workers are asked to perform new or different roles. In the event that your work does change, health regions will provide you with support.

What about the recent decision to create a provincial linen service? There will be jobs lost as a result of this change. Wasn’t Lean used to develop the solution?
A provincial linen service will make things better for patients and staff. It will help prevent and control infection, and reduce injuries to employees. It will also save Saskatchewan taxpayers an estimated $93-million over the next 10 years.

In reaching this decision, 3sHealth considered several options, including rebuilding existing laundry plants, consolidating the central laundries into fewer and larger sites, contracting services to a third party or a combination of these options. The single plant, private model was ultimately selected based on its ability to improve quality while significantly reducing costs.

Although Lean tools were used to explore certain processes -- such as how to ensure facilities have the right amount of linen when they need it -- that information did not influence the decision to create a provincial service. During the two year transition period, regional health authorities will work with unions and staff to develop mitigation strategies to reduce the impact on staff.

Training

What kind of training will staff receive?
Our goal as a system is to have all 40,000+ people working in health care participate in a one-day course called Kaizen Basics. This workshop provides people with a broad overview of Lean principles and methods, so they understand the changes taking place, and have a sense of what to expect when they are invited to participate in an improvement event.

Approximately 800 senior leaders and managers are taking intensive training, called Lean Leader Certification; this level of training takes about 70 days over the course of 18-24 months. In between these two formal learning opportunities, health organizations will build capability in their workforce to apply Lean tools and concepts, through 5S events, applying visual daily management, mistake-proofing, and standard work.
For more information

Where can I get more information? Who should I contact if I have questions, concerns?

Contact the Provincial Kaizen Promotion Office (PKPO)
Debra-Jane Wright, Director
Tel: (306)668-8810, ext. 110 / dwright@hq.c.sk.ca.

John Black and Associates, LLC is facilitating deployment of the Saskatchewan Health Care Management System.

Continuously improving the care experience of patients, families and providers.

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