

The Challenge

The Laundry Department in this fully integrated healthcare system was no different than most. Each day had the same objectives: catch up from the previous days and try not to run out of linen in the process. There were always high levels of work in process (WIP) and maintaining par levels was only a dream. As a result, customer demand was hard to meet, employee satisfaction was low, and problem-solving the situation seemed to be an unreachable goal.

Targets

An eight-member team was established to overhaul the Laundry Department during the workshop week. They were charged with the following targets:

- Reduce the WIP by 50%
- Level the work load
- Implement standard work
- Improve turnaround time to same day
- Improve employee and customer satisfaction by 50%
- Reduce laundry costs by 20%
- Track additional cost savings by tracking energy cost improvements

Before: WIP, work-in-process, including wet laundry often sat over 24 hours.



After: The new work cell allows continuous 'flow' and eliminated the 'batching' of laundry. Customer and employee satisfaction dramatically improved



Areas of Focus

The Team focused on several different areas/processes within the Laundry Department. To begin, the Team identified value-added from non-value-added steps. This helped in prioritizing the work for the rest of the workshop, which involved the following areas:

- Floor space
- Work flow layout
- Customer demand & satisfaction
- Specialized items
- Infection control
- Ergonomic standards
- Productivity
- Employee satisfaction

Workshop Actions

The Team “divided and conquered” and by the end of the workshop week a new Laundry Department was created. Some of the actions taken are listed below:

- Identified proper par quantities
- Implemented a Scrub program
- Installed a sink and moved a washer
- Arranged for housekeeping services on a regular basis
- Established standard schedule rotations
- Determined a method for tracking TAT
- Organized the work space
- Created Standard Work for the Laundry Department
- Established visual controls
- Surveyed employees and customers
- Developed a training matrix then completed it
- Obtained chemical containers for storage
- Included weighing the laundry in the process instead of it being a separate step

Outcomes

The outcomes of this workshop were incredible thanks to this Team and the support throughout the organization. There were many “big wins”, such as:

- Eliminated 11 laundry items which reduced complexity
- Standardized scrub color system for all departments
- Reduced storage space by 400 square feet
- Increased linear shelf productivity by 220 linear feet
- Eliminated 9 steps that were redundant and non-value-added
- Standardized all carts
- Implemented standard work for infection control, folding and delivering
- Improved employee and customer satisfaction
- Eliminated rolling bins in core processing
- Eliminated batching
- Created a visual board to show what to work on next
- Established a “barrier” to limit walking across into a clean area

Results

Expectations were exceeded during this workshop and a vision was established. The ultimate result is that the Laundry Team works in a safe and efficient manner, utilizing steady flow and standard work. Members of this highly productive team sum it up best. Here are some of their comments:

“I’m excited to come to work this weekend and work with the new flow.”

“I wish we could do this in all areas.”

“I’m so impressed with this LEAN process...after 8 years of different programs; it’s exciting to see this work.”