

Kaiser Permanente: “Perfection is the Goal” for Patient Safety

By Nora Haile
Contributing Editor
California Healthcare News



While it's laudable for a hospital to attain an “A” rating in patient safety from the Leapfrog Group, Kaiser Permanente has garnered the highest scores for 13 of its Southern California and 18 of its Northern California hospitals. Barbara Crawford, vice president, Quality & Regulatory Services for Northern California, and Patti Harvey, sr. vice president, Quality & Risk Management, Patient Care

Services, Clinical Operations for Southern California, spoke to us about how their approaches and technology helped them reach the coveted level in patient safety. Both credit an unwavering dedication of highly trained staff and physicians, Electronic Health Records (EHR) use and infection-control surveillance technology for Kaiser Permanente's success in hospital safety. However, Leapfrog, as a publicly recorded perspective on safety, is only one indicator for Kaiser Permanente, which also examines its own composites, using technology and proven methods to improve reliability and performance.

Crawford, speaking about EHR technology use, says outpatient and inpatient linkage with EHR is a great contributor to quality check systems, like the system-wide annual Computerized Physician Order Entry (CPOE) evaluation. “The process tracks CPOE through the many levels in the EHR, from the time it's written, when the pharmacist sees and fills the

medication, to when it's delivered and the nurse acts upon it,” she explains. Tracking at each data point helps ensure multiple opportunities for the system to detect potential errors. The robust Leapfrog CPOE evaluation takes several hours, engaging physicians at each facility. “The CPOE is foundational for us with respect to Leapfrog scores. All of our California hospitals have passed the CPOE evaluation.” The CPOE test is also often the biggest barrier for many hospitals because it requires so much hands-on work in addition to the technology aspect.

Harvey shares that she and Crawford work closely from a safety and reliability perspective. Referring to the CPOE, “Both safety and reliability teams are on the phone doing the activities prior to, during and post testing. It's unique from a system perspective because we learn together.” The process allows Kaiser Permanente to look at all points – front to back – and choose what works best rather than reinventing the wheel. “Our approach lets us spread capability

much more quickly. If you look at what helps our performance on Leapfrog over time, it is primarily our ability to learn and to effectively share what we learn.”

Another safety measure, the infection-surveillance system, was first piloted in Southern California. It allows Kaiser Permanente hospitals to more accurately detect when a patient is at risk for or has experienced a hospital-associated infection. The technology, once tested and proven in Southern California and evaluated with respect to results and benefits to members, will then be implemented in Northern California hospitals as well. Similarly, Northern California Kaiser Permanente hospitals piloted a different hand-hygiene technology than Southern California. The “winning” product is one that is easy to implement and that staff likes to use. All is done within the construct of patient and employee safety.

Transparency across the system has been crucial to quality and safety

program success, with technology being leveraged to show the information via dashboards. Should an adverse event occur, the causes of the event and steps to avoid it are shared not only within the medical center where it occurred, but also across the entire Kaiser Permanente hospital system. The organization takes a program perspective – local, regional, national. As Harvey says, “We have to look at not only what happened, but also the how and why, so we can prevent it happening again.”

Crawford and Harvey have the same executive director for Patient Safety who oversees the programs with them. “We’ve implemented culture measurement and safe practices based on employee input, as well as successful Patient and Family Advisory Councils and a Patient Safety University. All are geared toward helping us understand what more we can do to create a safe environment for employees, patients and families,” Crawford explains.

Goal alignment from top down and bottom up for employees has been another reason why Kaiser Permanente can effectively execute its patient safety programs. Harvey notes that goal alignment means unmatched safe and equitable care delivery and assures that all those involved are on the same page. Plus, everyone can see how he or she is personally involved in attaining the organization’s goals.

Both Harvey and Crawford affirm that participation in the greater healthcare community prevents insularity. Before undertaking any new initiative, the organization looks at who’s doing it best and then consults with that group or individuals.

“In areas of patient safety, our goal is to get to zero harm,” Crawford stated. “Perfection is the goal. Don’t our patients deserve that?”

Nora Haile can be reached at nhaile@healthcarenewssite.com.

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