

**September 2005.** Hope all of you have had a nice summer and are looking forward to a beautiful fall.

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Quality improvement is FREE!

The point of a quality improvement program should not only be to improve a product or the delivery of healthcare but it should also be to save time and money by reducing or eliminating waste or errors. For example, a doctor or nurse practitioner writes a prescription. We wouldn't deliver some of the best quality pills along with a few randomly chosen pills and we wouldn't completely incorrectly fill the prescription. To do either could create serious consequences. Rather, we want to only deliver the best quality. But there is another side to not achieving the best quality. If we incorrectly fill the prescription, even if there is no patient harm, there is waste. Once the error is found, the prescription must be refilled and paperwork redone. Wasted time and money for the healthcare provider!

Quality projects build processes that prevent errors and waste. In fact, the main goal of lean healthcare is to eliminate waste in a structured approach. The Japanese use the term kaisen event. They use this idea to eliminate waste in any environment, whether manufacturing or service orientated.

Quality projects that I have done have always resulted in avoidance of waste and thus a savings in time and cost. Almost all projects I have read about in journals present the savings of cost and time. Hence, if you are involved in a quality project you need to calculate the costs in time and money of accomplishing a process as it currently exists and then do the same for the "quality improved" process. There should be a substantial savings of both time and money. After all, time is money.

To make the required analysis I suggest that one of the project team members be your cost accountant or chief financial officer. Doing so will improve the accuracy of calculations of savings. Plus, you will impress upon one of the leaders of your healthcare unit the importance of continuing quality projects. In fact, your project team will probably be lauded for their achievement.

Finally, in totaling the costs of a project, don't forget to factor in the costs of the team in time and money. Count the costs of materials used, the pays of all involved and the time spent by all on the project. If the project is well executed and planned, you should realize a substantial cost/benefit ratio. That is, the costs of executing the project should be a fraction of the realized savings. Calculating this ratio speaks the language of upper management and directors and produces positive benefits, such as the demand for more of such projects. You will be able to aptly demonstrate that "Quality is Free."

Overall, as demonstrated, quality improvement projects should not only deliver a superior product but also should demonstrate the savings in time and money. Doing so ensures the continuance of quality improvement at a site, which will produce superior products with little waste.

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If you want to dramatically improve the health of your site and find that you need help in implementing the right tools and methods, please feel free to contact me at [t.Bryant@alumni.utexas.net](mailto:t.Bryant@alumni.utexas.net) or call 616-987-9589. You can also find out more at <http://www.bryantsstatisticalconsulting.com>. Good luck!

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