



# LEAN Healthcare

## South Carolina

## Lean Healthcare Services: Improving efficiency and morale at Bamberg County Hospital

It's a chronic problem for many healthcare facilities throughout South Carolina and the rest of the country: patients frustrated by extended, unnecessary wait times for surgery and emergency room procedures.

Bamberg County Hospital experienced similar pangs, and its patients similar aggravation. Yet in 2006, the hospital was able to resolve those concerns by utilizing a comprehensive healthcare program offered by South Carolina Manufacturing Extension Partnership (SCMEP), a private, nonprofit group dedicated to helping state businesses.

Bamberg used SCMEP's Lean Healthcare Services, a program geared to improve the quality and efficiency of medical systems around the state. The hospital found quick success -- drastically reducing wait times, increasing savings and boosting patient satisfaction.

### Lean Program

SCMEP's South Carolina manufacturing clients consistently cite rising healthcare costs as their number one complaint. Lean can help alleviate those worries by improving productivity and achieving better end results throughout the state, at any of the 90 hospitals and other healthcare facilities.

The 8-session training course teaches participants to solve problems, and to enhance and quicken processes. Bottom line: Lean streamlines healthcare organizations, reducing waste, eliminating communication breakdowns and shortening wait times. It's better for patients, staff and clinicians -- physically, emotionally and professionally.

### Difficulties and Solutions at Bamberg

To combat the protracted waiting times for surgery, a visual scheduling system was developed to make better use of the operating room, which contained four separate rooms with different functions.

Standards were set for room assignments based on procedure. In the past, Bamberg had made poor use of the space, occasionally using the most advanced room for less demanding procedures. The hospital also set rules for procedure times, "double booking" of rooms and appointments for groups arriving by bus.

Just two months after the program, surgery times had become much more predictable, and wait time decreased. Bamberg realized an annual savings of \$40,000 in the operating room by eliminating many overtime hours, and staff morale improved as a result. The hospital even projected a 10-20 percent bump in surgery revenue because of superior efficiency.

As to the long wait times in the emergency rooms, physicians and nurses worked to increase flow by improving registration and making better use of beds. Again, Lean worked. The hospital began treating more than 1,000 patients each month in the emergency room -- a 17 percent increase. Financially, Lean also had a positive impact, as fixed costs were absorbed among a larger number of patients. ER Press-Ganey scores indicated greater patient satisfaction, as a culture of cooperation and collaboration was built and sustained.

### **Other Lean Benefits**

The hospital also committed to reducing lagging times for administration of pain meds. Essentially, when pain hits, patients have immediate relief. The program -- headed up by a group of nurses working with physicians -- showed successful results and an improvement in the Press-Gainey numbers was expected in the next quarterly report.

Additionally, physicians and nurses began work to improve flow throughout the ER. Having surpassed the "1,000 patients treated in the ER per month mark," the hospital has sought to further increase the number of patients seen. In the process, Bamberg will review the amount of time needed to admit an ER patient as an in-patient, which should result in improved satisfaction and a capacity increase in the ER.

### **Morale Boost**

Possibly an overlooked aspect of the Lean program is the effect on staff morale and spirits, which can be attributed to increased efficiency. Hospital staff long dreaded the extended wait times in the cafeteria on days the fryer was used, to say, fry chicken or other items. It was found that only one fryer was being utilized because of previous fire-suppression improvements. Adjustments were initiated to make use of two fryers, significantly reducing wait times and complaints.