

Building a Culture of Safety At St. Tammany Health System

Seeking to expedite the journey to zero harm, St. Tammany Health System applied high-reliability leading practices to improve quality and increase safety throughout the organization.

Challenge

St. Tammany Health System (STHS) spent months working to improve the care environment for its patients, employees and physicians — including a commitment to zero harm. Safety challenges can negatively affect quality outcomes, and STHS leaders knew they needed to formalize their strategies to create an organization and culture relentlessly focused on patient safety.

Approach

STHS worked with Huron to introduce and hardwire the principles and leading practices of high reliability across the health system to address quality and safety roadblocks and accelerate the journey to zero harm.

The STHS and Huron approach to zero harm and high reliability focused on:

Educating leaders and staff: Organizational alignment is foundational to building a high-reliability culture. With that in mind, STHS and Huron began with a focus on education for board members, executives and leaders in the organization. The team defined what high reliability meant for the health system and why it would accelerate the goals of providing the highest-quality care to patients. This helped build buy-in and support from key leaders that would be critical to execution as new behaviors and processes were cascaded down to the front lines.

RESULTS

Culture of Safety Survey Improvements

Overall patient **safety grade** increased from **81%** to **89%**

Reporting of safety events increased **19** percentage points

Communication about errors increased **10** percentage points

Response to error increased **25** percentage points

Hospital-Acquired Conditions Improvements

Hospital-acquired **infections** decreased by **24%**

Surgical site **infections** decreased by **67%**

Deploying organizationwide communication:

Establishing a framework for better communication was a top priority as STHS needed to build and maintain alignment and engagement in the journey to zero harm. The team hardwired processes for broadly cascading information to drive safety and quality. The teams also expanded and elevated safety huddles, which included daily reports of safety concerns from leaders across the system, a focused agenda and a plan for follow-up communication. The flow of safety information became efficient, targeted and habitual, which enabled the organization to respond faster to safety incidents or avoid them entirely.

“At St. Tammany Health System, we are dedicated to achieving zero harm, and we have found the assistance of Huron to be indispensable on our journey to high reliability. They have taught us how to use our own data to find the places where improvement is needed. They have taught us how to hardwire excellence by creating habits and pathways of care. We are grateful to the Huron coaches and collective team for helping us achieve our mission as the heartbeat of our community, caring for patients and families with excellence, compassion and teamwork.”

JOAN COFFMAN, CEO



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Elevating the need for actionable steps:

Understanding or identifying the root causes of issues, reporting safety concerns or incidents, and creating actionable steps to avoid future errors are inherent in a high-reliability organization. To support this, STHS and Huron created and implemented survey action plans based on survey results, which were developed at the organizational, unit and department levels. Updates to these plans were communicated during employee forums and staff meetings to drive alignment and accountability.

Monthly reviews of safety events and annual assessments of safety risks and readiness increased visibility of the organization's operations, allowing STHS to better identify and analyze patient quality data.

Delivering accessible, useful data insights:

High reliability relies heavily on continuous improvement driven by measurable goals. Huron and STHS worked collaboratively to advance quality and safety data reporting, making it easier for the organization to uncover safety issues and solve problems. The teams designed and deployed data dashboards, giving leaders access to patient safety and quality metrics essential to tracking progress and adjusting behaviors or processes to improve results.