

Relentless Customer Focus: Cancer Treatment Centers of America

Patient-centered care, continuous improvement cultural change.

Part 2 of a Series: Lean Healthcare.

Lea A.P. Tonkin

Aggressive and effective use of healthcare and process improvement tools/techniques marks day-to-day activities at Cancer Treatment Centers of America (CTCA) at Midwestern Regional Medical Center in Zion, IL. Yet the most powerful force at work here is the human touch — a cultural focus on people cared for, and on those who make it all happen through direct contact with patients or in various support processes. Participants in a recent AME workshop at the north suburban Chicago hospital, “Using the A3 to Empower and Enable Employees to Support Continuous Improvement,” heard from many CTCA employees about the ways they are making improvements throughout the organization. A workshop tour group is shown in Figure 1.

The Mother Standard

Even as CTCA leadership seeks to deepen their culture of continuous improvement (CI) through organization-wide Lean Six Sigma training (the efficient translation of customer desires into patient loyalty), their “Mother Standard” lives on, according to Anne Meisner, president and CEO of CTCA at

Midwestern Regional Medical Center. Simply put, that means providing medical treatment options delivered in a compassionate, patient-centered way — as you would care for your own mother or others in your family.

“Whole person treatment” predominates. Here you will receive the most advanced medical treatments available and learn about

In Brief

Creating and sustaining cultural change to bring about day-by-day, patient-focused care and performance improvements is the goal for all employees throughout Cancer Treatment Centers of America (CTCA). Their aggressive training and development work is bringing early process improvements and holds the promise of sustained change, as people at all levels are trained, coached, and empowered to make improvements on a day-by-day basis.



Figure 1. AME workshop participants learned about a variety of improvement activities during a tour at the Cancer Treatment Centers of America (CTCA) at the Midwestern Regional Medical Center in Zion, IL.

nutrition, naturopathic treatment, mind-body understanding, physical therapy, spiritual counseling, and family counseling. Values at work here are: hopeful, compassionate, ethical, responsive, innovative, and team-spirited.

From the time when current, potential, or previous patients and their families enter the CTCA at

Midwestern through administrative, diagnostic, and treatment and follow-up sessions, CTCA stakeholders strive to make their experience as positive as possible. “Nurse navigators” help first-time patients and caregivers find their way through registration and on to any consultations or other needed stops. If CTCA stakeholders/employees achieve

their CI goals, everything from the admissions process to transport times, availability of diagnostic equipment at scheduled times, correct dosages of needed medications, and other elements of patients’ care will be streamlined and customer-focused.

Honing Improvement During Rapid Expansion

How does CTCA create and nurture this culture of caring and improvement, even as it’s expanding rapidly? It helps that CTCA aimed to provide exceptional service from the start, when Richard J. Stephenson launched CTCA at the Zion site. The facility was formerly a hospital where his mother had been treated for cancer some time earlier. Cancer Treatment Centers of America continues as a private hospital organization tenaciously focused on one thing: helping patients fight cancer and win.

Leadership recognized that as the organization grew, they’d be challenged to improve their service at existing and new operations. CTCA has approximately 19 percent more patients compared to a year earlier, with three hospitals and another one opening at the end of 2008 in Goodyear, AZ. They were seeking ways to ensure CI would character-

About Cancer Treatment Centers of America (CTCA)

Founded in 1988, Cancer Treatment Centers of America (CTCA) is a network of cancer treatment hospitals and community oncology programs in Illinois, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and Washington; a location in Arizona is scheduled to open in early 2009. CTCA provides a comprehensive, patient-centered treatment model that integrates conventional, state-of-the-art medical treatments and scientifically-supported complementary therapies. CTCA offers leading diagnostics and clinical care including medical oncology (advanced chemotherapy agents, new biologics, etc.), radiation oncology (Tomotherapy, high dose rate [HDR] brachytherapy, intensity modulated radiation therapy, Calypso GPS for the body for prostate cancer patients), and surgical oncology (radical resections, radiofrequency ablation, intra-operative ultrasound [IOUS], and oncoplastic surgery). Their vision: To be recognized and trusted by people living with cancer as the premier center for healing and hope. More information about CTCA is available at cancercenter.com.

ize all operations, serving external as well as internal customers.

CTCA Chairman Richard J. Stephenson can be cited as the main force behind the hospital's unique CI culture. He and the staff of dedicated care practitioners are responsible for the turning point in the organization's approach to driving CI and patient satisfaction.

They've adopted Lean Six Sigma and related improvement concepts as the means to align their culture with customer needs. Deployment tactics range from Key Performance Indicators (KPI) to the A3 improvement process, six sigma training, and kaizen events. "We are relentless in seeking the voice of the customer," said Herb DeBarba, vice president of lean operations. Focus groups plus one-on-one interviews with current and former patients and caregivers yield feedback to spur CI. "For example, at our hospital in Tulsa, OK we did a Six Sigma project that resulted in improved nutritional care for 450 patients," DeBarba said. Better nutrition complements patient care and can lead to improved strength during treatment and better quality of life.

As workshop participants learned, the organization's extensive training and improvement process investment is paying significant dividends. For example, they've made strides in:

- Same-day insurance verification
- Initial registration time reduced from an average 45 minutes to seven minutes
- Treatment plan developed within three to five days
- Ability to start treatment immediately
- Elimination of return patient registration
- Rapid gathering of patient records
- Elimination of repeat blood draws
- Decreased patient transfer time

from recovery to floor by 83 percent

- Positron Emission Tomography (PET scan) results within ten hours
- Reduced TAT (turnaround time) on tumor marker tests from 124 to 72 minutes.

Strategic Plan Calls for an Investment in All Employees

Across-the-board improvements, increasingly happening as a daily, built-in part of the "way we do things" reflects a significant commitment at CTCA:

- Leadership by example; all senior executives participate in Lean Six Sigma training and process improvement activities
- Investment in training at all levels of the organization
- Continued support for development of "belted" employees, A3 instructors, and certified lean coaches

- Commitment to A3 certification of *all* employees, nearly 1000 in Illinois and approximately 2500 nationwide.

All senior management is achieving certification at the green belt level, according to DeBarba. At the end of the fiscal year 2008, more than 60 green belts had been certified, compared to 30 a year earlier.

The rollout of A3 and Lean Six Sigma training for all employees continues. So far more than 400 are A3 certified. (See Figure 2.) Their emphasis on putting CI concepts to work on a daily basis nets better performance that patients and their families will notice, and boosts the organization's overall performance as well. (See sample performance improvements in Figure 3.)

CTCA's strategic plan includes "belted" certification of all supervisors and above. Training materials from external resources are taught virtually year-round by the Lean Six

CTCA Enterprise — Wide Lean Six Sigma Deployment (includes green belts and black belts)

FY 2005	No belts
FY 2006	14 belts
FY 2007	30 belts
FY 2008	60 belts.

Examples of improvements during the past year:

- Reduced delinquent billing from \$14 million to less than \$1 million in 26 days
- Improved nutritional support to 450 patients
- Reduced denials ten percent.

Figure 2.

Examples of Performance Improvements During the Past Year at Cancer Treatment Centers of America

- \$17 million in cost savings and capacity increases
- 58,884 employee non-value-added hours eliminated
- 8071 patient wait hours eliminated
- Record retrieval time decreased from five days to two days.

Figure 3.

Sigma department. This extensive investment is expected to yield significant performance improvements. CTCA wants “better than most” results in patient outcomes and costs; a care model that relies on Lean Six Sigma for enterprise-wide, long-term CI; and customer survey results indicating 100 percent would bring their mother to CTCA. CTCA has a healthcare industry-leading net promoter score (NPS) at 90 percent on internal surveys; the average hospital NPS is 55.

A3 at Work

The CTCA A3 Performance ImprovementSM tool encourages problem solving in a lean environment, as explained by Linda Morley, a lean Six Sigma specialist. A3 “students” learn to identify and create a good problem statement; identify waste in a targeted process; clarify responsibilities and strategies for improving a process; develop meaningful objectives and metrics for process improvement; observe, document, and map their current process (value stream mapping or VSM); refine observations; analyze root causes of problems; and complete a cause analysis for their project.

Using lean tools (Figure 4), a proj-

ect team refines their VSM and problem statement. They then focus on future state VSM and how to implement a future state that can be sustained. They participate in team sharing homework, and evaluate how the changes work in practice (go to the gemba). They devise metrics and a follow-up plan, learning how to calculate cost and time savings from implemented changes. Sharing their completed A3 plan with their class, the team reviews their project for accuracy and com-

pleteness. After finalizing their project presentation, they participate in a graduation process with others who also share completed project details. Senior executives and hospital board of trustees participate in the graduation ceremonies, offering their congratulations and questions.

Process Improvement Examples

Anyone who’s been a hospital patient or visitor can appreciate the value of A3 projects cited by Sean Patrick Kane, CTCA at Midwestern’s manager of lean Six Sigma operations. For example, one project team (Plant Operations employees Allen Schroeder, Dave Owens, Jared Hoffman, and James Spencer) tackled the problem of patients waiting days or even weeks for repair of toilets when parts were unavailable or other problems slowed resolution. Examining the reason why parts were unavailable, the team found that no one person was responsible for ordering plumbing parts, there was no standard work for this process, and

Lean Toolkit

Project teams decide which tools to apply to their problem. Among the tools they consider:

- Team sharing A3 homework
- Standard work instructions
- Error proofing (poke yoke)
- Total Productive Maintenance (TPM)
- Work balancing
- Cellular layout
- 5S and visual workplace.

Figure 4.

minimum on-hand inventories of parts had not been defined. They recommended and then implemented improvements such as ordering a parts cabinet and bins for supplies, assigned responsibility to one person for ordering supplies, created standard work for keeping supplies in set order, and established minimum (par) levels for supplies. Not only did they boost customer satisfaction as repair cycle times plummeted to less than 24 hours, they also saved \$375 a month (\$4500 a year) as outside “unplanned” plumbing resource usage decreased.

In the imaging department, Mary Beth Migliore and Ray Meiers teamed up to trim patient wait times when technicians could not locate a transporter. Thanks to their A3 project work, the average time for locating a transporter decreased from an average 17 minutes to five minutes. Value-added time now available, as a result of their project, is estimated at 1300 hours/year or about \$11,700 in savings (personnel would otherwise have been waiting for patients to arrive). Improvement steps taken, as recommended by the project team, included giving transporters and technicians cell phones to communicate regarding transport requests; installing a board that visually updates patient load and transporter availability and responsibilities; creation of standard work for transporters and technicians; and communication of the new plan with the entire imaging department.

As Kane noted, the A3 projects can be focused in any area including patient care, support, or administrative roles. The outcome of such projects, while they may initially appear subtle, greatly improve the quality of a patient’s treatment or work life in important and invaluable ways, he said.

Workforce Empowerment

The A3 projects being rolled out in all CTCA hospitals provide education about lean principles and support stakeholder empowerment for creation of day-by-day improvements, according to Ron Kaczmarek, director of lean Six Sigma operations for CTCA. The cultural transformation underway here through lean and A3 starts with senior management and extends through frontline staff, middle management, and all others in the organization. Middle managers, for example, are transitioning from problem solvers to coaches, mentors, and champions. “This requires specific knowledge, tools, and techniques, as well as employee empowerment and project management skills,” Kaczmarek said.

Although ramping up the CTCA lean and six sigma training has brought promising initial results during the past three years, Kaczmarek said there’s a need to

delve into effective means for getting *each* person to take the initiative to improve their work processes, every day. Among his tips for encouraging this cultural change: Focus on the work and the problem at hand — avoid blame; do not jump to conclusions; keep the responsibility with the person doing the work; spend time on the floor; ask “why;” and realize that saying there are no problems is a problem.

Senior leadership and leaders at all levels can encourage and enable personal responsibility for problem solving by clearly setting the vision, building systems and processes that cascade responsibility, and by “influence” (example, coaching, questioning, etc.). Project sponsors at CTCA play a key role in helping to shepherd and spotlight A3 and other lean improvements, added Kaczmarek. The tasks of a sponsor are shown in Figure 5.

Sustaining cultural change and building long-term individual/team improvement accountability is a

Tasks of a Sponsor

- Ask the right questions; does the project make sense
- Support project work through regular reviews
- Motivate and make it fun
- Be a change agent; drive out fears
- Remove barriers and roadblocks
- Provide resources when needed
- Support identification and scoping of projects
- Recognize project status
- Drive project closure — savings and benefits
- Ensure execution of steps needed to assure long-term control
- Create a level of accountability and contribution
- Encourage changes in attitudes and behaviors
- Change the way we think about and approach problems.

Figure 5.

Sustaining cultural change and building long-term individual/team improvement accountability is a strong challenge.

strong challenge. Kaczmarek said factors contributing to sustained change include:

- Select and work on the most important problems and projects that are defined by the customer
- Assure that selected improvement projects affect customer satisfaction and financial performance
- Allocate time and resources to get the work done
- Provide project participants with the tools, training, and resources they need to make performance breakthroughs
- Provide management direction, support, and routine reviews of performance
- Require well thought out, data-driven, objective solutions
- Verify the impact of your efforts
- Sustain the benefits of the solution over time.

"Our intention and strategic vision is to ensure that a Cancer Treatment Centers of America hospital is located within 300 miles from anyone experiencing the devastation of a cancer diagnosis," said Anne Meisner. "To ensure we are able to flawlessly execute on the Mother Standard of Care in a true patient empowerment model, we live in a culture of continuous improvement relentlessly focusing on what the patient needs and what the patient values. Each employee starts with that fundamental knowledge; through Lean Six Sigma we empower them to deliver and it's our patients who benefit."

Lea A.P. Tonkin, Target executive editor, lives in Woodstock, IL.

© 2009 AME® For information on reprints, contact:
AME Association for Manufacturing Excellence
www.ame.org



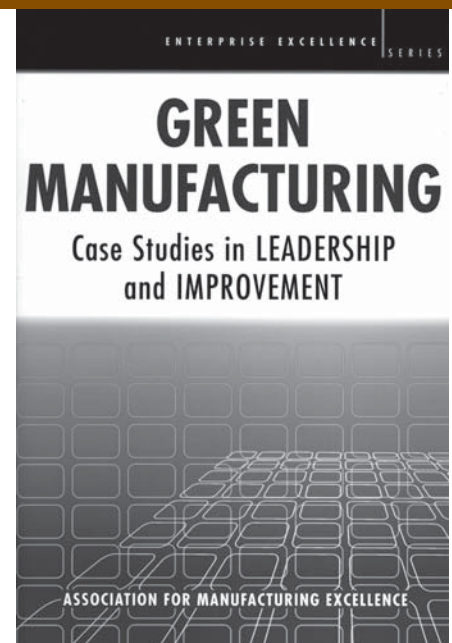
Case Studies in Lean and Sustainability

Green Manufacturing

This book was released by the Association for Manufacturing Excellence (AME) and published by Productivity Press as part of the Enterprise Excellence Series. The first book in the series, *Lean Administration* was published in 2007.

Environmental issues are growing in importance for all manufacturers, and while a variety of articles have focused on these issues, there are virtually no books that do so. Continuing with the Enterprise Excellence Series, this book brings together articles and case studies, previously published in AME's *Target Magazine*, on environmental, and energy issues.

Highlights include practical, in-depth descriptions of environmental, and energy issues – including discussions of application of lean principles to these issues.



Most Productivity Press Books are available at quantity discounts when purchased in bulk. To order a copy, go to the website (www.ProductivityPress.com).