

Small Changes Are Making a Difference in Alabama

In July 2011, the Alabama Department of Public Health hosted a one day training on basic quality improvement (QI) skills, supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) National Public Health Improvement Initiative. During the training, participants were asked to identify one challenge they were facing in their daily activities; everyone identified clinic wait times as a problem. At the same time, the State Title X Training Coordinator was conducting a clinic efficiency project in a limited number of county health departments that yielded promising results. Using Title X training funds, State QI and Family Planning staff brought in Cicatelli Associates, Inc., to provide more in depth QI training. This widened the scope of the clinic efficiency project so that it could be taken statewide by stakeholders from each public health area.

Each team reviewed or learned QI tools to help them analyze current procedures and understand service delivery bottlenecks and gaps. By thoroughly understanding their current situation, team members were able to make small changes which are hoped to lead to big results: increased capacity to see patients and a reduction in wait-times (see preliminary result details in tables below). These changes come at a time when the state budget for fiscal year 2013 is being reduced and staff is challenged to provide at least the same level of services with fewer resources. By utilizing QI tools and techniques to help make operational changes, the staff is already serving more patients more efficiently.

Small Changes...

- 7 Scheduling staff to arrive 30 minutes prior to the first morning appointment
- 7 Providing reminder phone-calls to patients the afternoon before their appointment
- 7 Double booking providers at the times of day when the no-show rate is the highest
- 7 Scheduling open time for provider
- 7 Honoring appointment times (if client is early or late for their appointment, asking them to wait or reschedule)

...Promising Results in 3 Counties when comparing the month in 2011 to 2012

Lauderdale County:

January 2012, saw 80 additional patients
 Reduced wait-time from 64 to 54 minutes

Shelby County:

January-March 2012, saw 49 additional patients
 Reduced wait-time from 56 to 53 minutes

Lee County:

January-March 2012, saw 221 additional patients
 Maintained 37 minute wait-time

Building on the QI successes already experienced, four new QI projects are underway:

1. Updating the Medication Accountability protocol to increase clinic efficiency.
2. Updating the customer satisfaction survey mechanism.
3. Analyzing and formalizing the TB protocol to increase clinic efficiency.
4. Using Lean Six Sigma methodology to write and institute a chlamydia fast track treatment protocol.