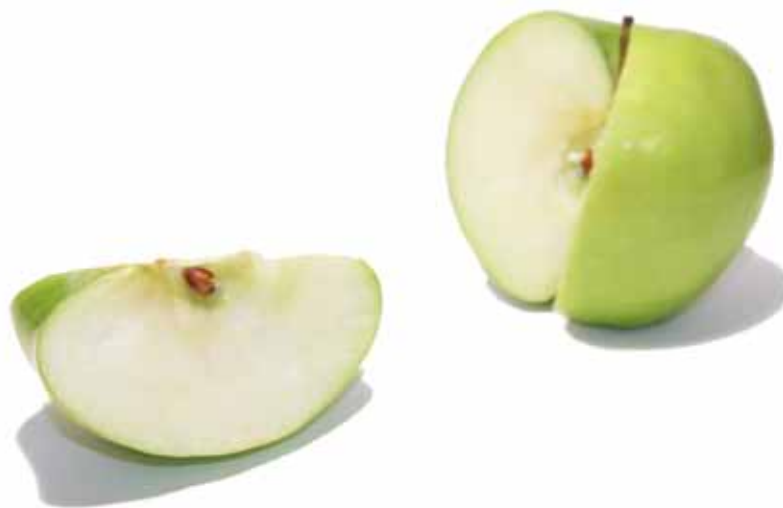


Lean in health care

Taking a patient-centred approach



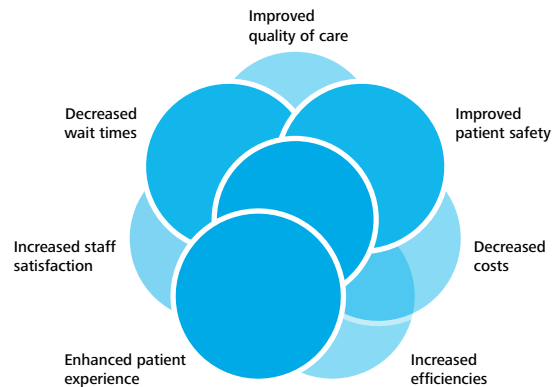
Lean cannot be looked upon as another cost cutting initiative – instead it must be embraced as a fundamental shift in thinking that will allow an organization to more efficiently and effectively provide patient-centred care.

For years, the health care industry has implemented a variety of approaches to identify appropriate ways to improve operations. To enhance both quality of care and service efficiency, organizations have applied approaches such as continuous quality improvement and business process reengineering with some success. Yet, despite these efforts, sustainable change remains elusive.

In the last few years, more Canadian health care organizations have been turning to Lean principles and tools. Lean is known for its ability to help organizations effect lasting change and its successful application in other industries is well documented. For health care stakeholders, however, the effective application of Lean can be difficult, given the industry's service-oriented nature and the complexity of its patient care processes.

Lean is patient-centred. In health care patients are the end consumers of care and thus, value must be defined from their perspective.

Potential benefits to be realized by applying Lean in healthcare



While these challenges are sometimes perceived as barriers, there is a flip side. If applied thoughtfully and strategically within the health care sector, Lean principles can not only help to drive systemic change and improvement; they can also deliver benefits across multiple dimensions, going well beyond simple efficiency gains to affect processes that enable improved clinical outcomes and patient satisfaction.

While most health care organizations maintain a commitment to patient-centred service, care is not always provided in a manner consistent with that philosophy.

Adding to the structure means strengthening the foundation

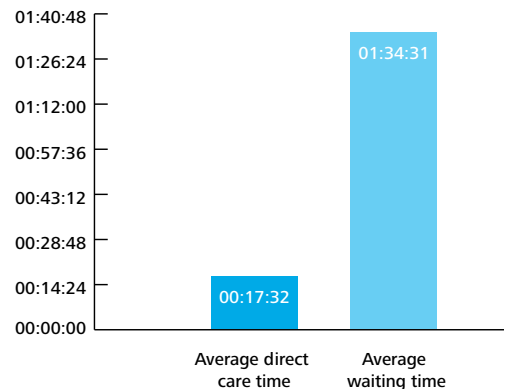
In health care, there are four key components or building blocks required to create the foundation for a successful Lean journey:

1. Translating Lean into the health care environment – making Lean language relevant and meaningful

While most health care organizations maintain a commitment to patient-centred service, care is not always provided in a manner consistent with that philosophy. For example, many ambulatory clinics front load patient appointments so clinicians do not sit “idle” waiting for patients. As a result, patients are rarely seen at their scheduled appointment times and spend most of their time waiting (see graph below). This practice is primarily provider-centric and provides very little value to patients for the majority of time spent in the clinic.

Clinic visit duration breakdown

Average direct care vs. waiting time



Lean is patient-centred. In health care patients are the end consumers of care and thus, value must be defined from their perspective. As such, Lean gives health care providers an opportunity to revisit their current care processes and refocus on their

patients and their families/caregivers. To succeed at this, health care providers must integrate Lean with the language of their existing patient-centred care philosophy. By adopting Lean principles and tools into their current practice environment, health care providers can more quickly realize the benefits of Lean throughout their care environments.

2. **Lean leadership development – setting a vision for organizational transformation**

Before organizations can fully embrace a Lean way of thinking, they must establish a common understanding and vision. To build this foundation, leadership should begin by fostering a culture built on the Lean principles of quality, continuous improvement and innovation. To create this vision, organizations must understand what Lean thinking entails and articulate both what Lean is and what it is not.

Beyond establishing an attainable vision, leadership should also actively support continuous internal education to enhance their organization's capacity to apply Lean principles and tools to day-to-day practices. By staying connected with the frontline resources driving this change, active leaders can play a critical role in making Lean's framework and toolkit a practical reality.

3. **Change management – creating the platform for continuous and sustained improvements**

After establishing a vision, the application of change management principles can help health care organizations to ensure its adoption. This is a critical step in realizing the gains associated with Lean practices. While it can seem easy to identify issues and potential solutions, the real challenge lies in transitioning from assessment and planning processes to the actual implementation of change. Integration that incorporates solid change management into the process can both increase change adoption rates and optimize organizational ability to sustain change.

For example, in our experience, transitions to Lean go much more smoothly when physicians and staff receive the coaching and support required to effect rapid cycle improvements. This 'learn by doing' philosophy provides organizations with the knowledge, tools, change process ownership and confidence they need to make Lean process improvements in their day-to-day work environment. It also conveys leadership commitment to the improvements while building internal capacity for future improvement projects.

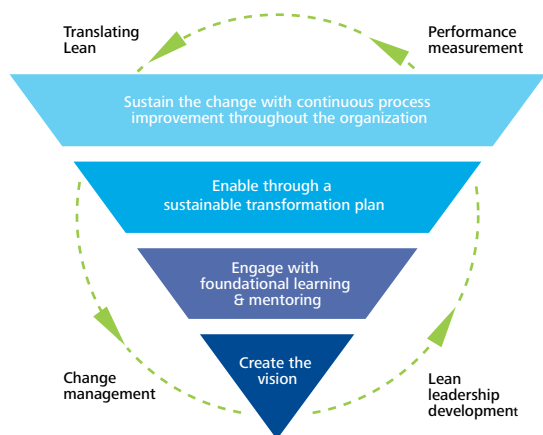
Effective change management, Lean leadership and performance measurement are often the missing links between theoretical solutions and practical application.

4. **Performance measurement – building a positive, results-based Lean culture**

The development of a performance management framework is an essential building block for any organization, but is particularly important for the organization seeking to transform itself into a Lean patient-centred provider. This framework gives change leaders the tools and processes to not only monitor progress, but to also communicate successes, build positive momentum and create an environment that can sustain change.

Yet, to realize these benefits, Lean processes must be developed and structured to ensure top to bottom organizational alignment. In addition to ensuring consistency, this integrated approach sends a direct message to all stakeholders that emphasizes the strategic and operational priority of Lean performance measurement. This reinforces the fact that Lean is not just another tool, but rather a foundational pillar upon which the organization's culture is based.

Our approach to building, integrating and sustaining a Lean culture



Enabling and sustaining Lean culture

Identifying improvements that enhance the quality of patient care is imperative in any Lean health care initiative. However, the sustainability of the Lean journey depends on an organization’s ability to fully enable the transition across the enterprise. In health care, this requires the integration of Lean language and concepts with a patient-centred philosophy. It requires the development of core Lean leadership committed to providing long-term support. It requires the implementation of a solid change management approach and the development of appropriate and ongoing performance measures. Above all, it requires a definition of value from the patient’s perspective. Without these key elements, the potential advantages of Lean may not be fully reached. With them, Canada’s health care organizations stand to realize significant long-term benefits.

By integrating Lean with a patient-centric philosophy, organizations do much more than simply adopt another set of quality improvement tools. Instead, they set the stage for the development of a Lean culture – an organization committed to continuous quality improvement that keeps their patients’ definition of value front and centre.

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