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Health Care Extra
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Health Care Extra

Hospital group targets ER patient flow

By [Jay Greene](#)

Maintaining patient flow through the emergency department — a main access point into a hospital — and into patient units is critical to smooth operations.

"As (patients) lose insurance (by layoffs), many are coming to the hospital through the ED," said Sam Watson, senior vice president of patient safety with the **Michigan Health and Hospital Association**. "We are not just looking at patient movement through the ED, but through the entire hospital."

The MHA has hired the Ann Arbor-based lean consulting firm **Lean Transformations Group L.L.C.** to help hospitals implement lean process engineering in their emergency departments, Watson said.

Over the first six months of the project, Watson said, hospitals are identifying bottlenecks that slow down patient flow and admissions. They also are addressing a variety of cultural workforce issues, including communication between providers and departments.

Watson said hospitals want to improve the time it takes for patients to see physicians once they enter emergency departments, to reduce the number of patients who leave without being seen and the amount of time patients wait for lab and test results.

"A hospital might decide to locate a lab inside the ED to improve turnaround time," Watson said. "They may want to redesign the building to improve the flow of patients being transported to departments."

Most hospitals in the project have some experience using lean management, Watson said. MHA is conducting a survey to determine the level of lean experience, he said.

"We are providing support for two years, and it is our hope lean will be a part of how a hospital does business and make it a part of their core work," he said.

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