

The Joint Commission Ambulatory Advisor

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Executive Director

Robust Process Improvement™ is alive and flourishing at The Joint Commission. As mentioned in a [previous column](#), we are using RPI tools internally to help improve customer satisfaction, reduce costs, and make our processes more efficient and effective.

One recent Green Belt project focused on reducing the time it takes to process and post an organization's accreditation report to its extranet site—previously an average of 16 days. The project's goal was to reduce all times below 10 days. The team's efforts cut the average time for processing and posting an accreditation report to six days.

Other Green Belt projects in the works focus on improving the consistency of standards interpretation and a closer alignment of print and electronic manuals, among others. It's clear that after a year of intense review using RPI tools, we have made significant process improvements in a number of areas that benefit our customers, and ultimately improve the quality and safety of patient care.

Whether you are already using tools such as Lean Six Sigma at your organization, or are just starting to explore these and other possibilities, consider this lesson learned from one of my fellow Green Belts: "When you hear that something has always been done a certain way, don't be afraid to ask why. Challenging that rationale can lead to real breakthroughs."

Read more about how The Joint Commission is tackling its own processes in a recent issue of [Quality Progress](#).

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Changes improve customer service

The Joint Commission's Division of Accreditation and Certification Operations has realigned into program specific teams to better support the unique nature of each type of customer.

"Dedicated account executives will become subject matter experts on many topics, from diagnostic imaging services to deemed status for ambulatory surgery centers, to urgent care organizations," says Pam Komperda, Ambulatory Care Service Team manager.

According to Komperda, the realignment signals a renewed focus on customer

needs. "The staff is confident that this realignment will help our customers reach their goal to provide safe, high quality care," she adds.



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Steam sterilization update

Based on discussions with various organizations and industry experts, The Joint Commission has made some decisions about the use of steam sterilization which affect the interpretation of standards as well as the survey process. The Joint Commission is refocusing its survey efforts on all of the critical processes included in steam sterilization. Surveyors will:

- Observe instruments from the time they leave one operating room to when they are returned to the next.
- Ask health care workers to provide the manufacturers' instructions for instrument sterilization, and to describe and demonstrate how

instruments are being cleaned and decontaminated according to those instructions.

- Observe the cleaning of instruments.
- Verify that staff members are wearing appropriate personal protective equipment.
- Observe the sterilization process.
- Review sterilization logs. Surveyors will ask about parametric, chemical and biological indicators.
- Observe the return of instruments to the sterile field and verify that they are being protected from recontamination.

For more information, visit The Joint Commission [Web site](#) or see the [CDC/HICPAC guideline](#).

From the field

"Steam sterilization is a critical part of the overall ophthalmologic surgical process. Based on peer review literature, we knew our infection rates in ophthalmology were extremely low—and this was due, in part, to proper cleaning, steam sterilization techniques and sterile instrument transfer," says Brad J. Shingleton, M.D., immediate past president of the American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery (ASCRS).

"A group of us representing the American Academy of Ophthalmology, the Outpatient Ophthalmic Surgery Society and the ASCRS contacted The Joint Commission, and we found them extremely receptive to our concerns. We shared data on infection issues unique to ophthalmology and they listened.

"This experience showed me that any subspecialty organization should feel confident bringing their concerns and hard data on issues that affect patient safety and quality to The Joint Commission."

Contracting with accredited organizations

The August issue of *The Joint Commission Perspectives* includes an important clarification about contracting for services with Joint Commission-accredited organizations. The article states that many accredited ambulatory care organizations spend time and resources addressing numerous requests for information from hospitals and other contracting organizations related to human resources and other standards, often resulting in redundancies and potential adversarial relationships between the contracting organizations and the ambulatory care providers.

According to Susan Schumer-Lurie, R.N., B.S.N., CPHQ, national director of

Quality, Alliance HealthCare Services, “This clarification should provide our customers with the assurance that we, as a Joint Commission-accredited organization, have met the same standards of quality and compliance as any other Joint Commission-accredited organization. This should also reduce duplication of work between the customer and the Joint Commission-accredited contracted service provider.

“Having met the same standards of performance, organizations should not require additional proof of standards compliance,” Schumer-Lurie says. “This is a matter of reciprocity between Joint Commission-accredited organizations.”

CTH tackles safety and quality problems

The [Joint Commission Center for Transforming Healthcare](#) launched in September with the aim of solving health care’s most critical safety and quality problems. The Center is using Robust Process Improvement™ (RPI) methods—Lean Six Sigma and change

management—to systematically measure the magnitude of serious quality and safety problems, pinpoint their underlying causes, and develop and test targeted, long-lasting solutions. The Center’s first initiative is tackling hand washing failures.

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In some cases the realignment resulted in changes to the account executives who service organizations. Check The

Joint Commission Connect extranet to identify your new ambulatory care account executive.

Revised 2010 National Patient Safety Goals

The Joint Commission has revised the 2010 National Patient Safety Goals and some changes are effective immediately. For the remainder of 2009, during the on-site survey, surveyors will not evaluate compliance with the requirements that have been deleted for 2010. The changes reflect The Joint Commission’s efforts to focus the NPSGs on those topics that are

of highest priority to patient safety and quality care. On January 1, 2010, organizations will be expected to have fully implemented the requirements related to health care-associated infections (which were established with the 2009 NPSGs). The pre-publication version of the 2010 NPSGs is available on the [Web site](#).

Universal Protocol changes

The Joint Commission has revised the Universal Protocol, and some changes are effective immediately. For the remainder of 2009, during the on-site survey, surveyors will not evaluate compliance with requirements that were eliminated or substantially modified for 2010. Other changes will be effective January 1, 2010. The intent of the revisions is to address patient safety issues while allowing organizations flexibility in applying the requirements. See the revised Universal Protocol on The Joint Commission [Web site](#).

TakeNote

2010 standards posted

The Joint Commission has posted prepublication versions of the 2010 standards on its [Web site](#). These standards will remain posted through December 1, when the print manuals are delivered and the E-dition is updated. Contact your account executive if you do not receive your print manual by December 1.

Reaching out via social media

Follow The Joint Commission on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube:

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/JCommission>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Joint-Commission/104533371063>

You Tube: <http://www.youtube.com/user/TheJointCommission>

Hit the links

Physicians Practice recently listed these patient-friendly Web sites:

- National Institutes of Health, <http://health.nih.gov>
- American Diabetes Association, www.diabetes.org
- American Heart Association’s patient portal on heart disease, www.hearthumb.org
- www.drugs.com, provides a drug interactions checker and pill wizard <http://www.physicianspractice.com/index/fuseaction/articles/details/articleID/1300.htm>

Look for us

- Texas ASC Society, Frisco, Texas, Nov. 12-13, booth 38
- Radiologic Society of North America, Chicago, Ill., Nov. 29-Dec.4, booth 5449

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