Supporting Leadership Engagement in Patient Safety

ASHRM

AMERICAN
SOCIETY FOR
HEALTH CARE
RISK
MANAGEMENT

OVERVIEW

Creating a culture of high reliability and patient safety requires intentional, visible leadership engagement. When leaders champion system learning, model transparency, and support structured change management practices, they set the foundation for sustainable safety improvements across the organization. This document outlines key strategies to strengthen leadership buy in, promote consistent communication, and ensure that improvement initiatives remain aligned, actionable, and impactful.

1. LEADERSHIP & ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Creating a culture of high reliability and safety begins with leadership. When leaders prioritize system learning, embed feedback into routines and advocate transparency and accountability, they set the tone for sustainable improvement across the organization.

- Gain leadership buy-in for system learning and loop closure practices
- Highlight leadership's role in driving system-wide safety improvements and responding to staff concerns
- Embed learning into leadership routines
- Give safety as much prominence in leadership meeting agendas as financials
- Promote transparency and shared accountability (Suggest tools like HRO to develop actual frameworks for this)
- Establish expectations for consistent leadership involvement
- Ensure initiatives don't fail when organizational priorities get realigned or overshadow the work

2. SYSTEM LEARNING & CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Driving sustainable system change requires structured management practice and team engagement to ensure solutions are realistic and aligned across the organization so they can be effective.

- Educate leaders on how to change the system and test of change performance improvement models
- Promote structured and standardized change management approaches
- Communicate the 'why' for the change with structure and rigor
- Define realistic timelines for solutions (fast is not always best)
- Engage team members for other perspectives
- Invest at least as much time on solutions as on problems (including processing of incident reports as part of the problems category)
- Assure initiatives are not "duplicative" or siloed

3. FEEDBACK & COMMUNICATION

Effective system learning requires structured and transparent feedback communication, sharing the 'why', involving frontline team in the design of interventions, and collaborating through pathways that support measurable change.

- Prioritize feedback loops for team members
- Communicate what is being done in response to team member's feedback
- Ensure communication is bi-directional
- Measure outcomes and share impact
- Communicate the 'why' for the change
- Establish a mechanism for consistent communication, even if there are minimal updates
- Determine the expected communication pathways so discussions don't unintentionally go off course

CONCLUSION

Sustained progress in patient safety depends on leaders who actively promote learning, collaborate with frontline teams, and reinforce clear communication pathways. By embedding accountability into routines, supporting structured change management practices, and maintaining strong feedback loops, leaders help ensure that system improvements are understood, adopted, and sustained. When leadership commitment is consistent and visible, the organization is better positioned to achieve meaningful, long term advancements in safety and reliability.