



Success study:

Workers' health at Oakville-Trafalgar Memorial Hospital

Situation:

In 2007, the in-patient psychiatric unit at Oakville-Trafalgar Memorial Hospital was experiencing high rates of nurse absenteeism due to illness, high staff turnover and, therefore, a heavy reliance on agency nurses who were not trained to work with mental health patients. As a direct result of these issues, the unit was reporting above-average use of physical and chemical restraints and frequent code whites (incidents of violent or aggressive behaviour).

Aim:

Significantly reduce staff absenteeism/sick days to below the rest of the hospital (Oakville-Trafalgar is part of Halton Healthcare Services) and below the provincial benchmark (10.3 days). Reduce staff turnover rates and decrease reliance on agency nurses in the psychiatric unit to zero within one year starting in June 2007.

Measures:

- Average staff sick days per full-time equivalent (FTE)
- Staff turnover rates per FTE per year (number of staff separations as a percentage of total staff headcount)
- Agency staff hours as a percentage of total worked hours
- Staff satisfaction with supervisor, workplace safety and involvement in decision-making

Changes:

- Conducted a root cause analysis through frequent staff meetings; nurses expressed concern about work-life balance, safety issues on the unit and their ability to contribute to decision-making
- Increased the presence of the director, manager and professional practice clinician to assist staff in solving daily operational issues — e.g., supporting nurses in patient case load or bathing patients
- Cultivated a collaborative environment by encouraging nurses to share their improvement ideas and give feedback at weekly staff meetings, as well as publicly posting minutes of staff meetings and progress reports
- Provided nurses with additional training in mental health patient care and therapeutic communication
- Allowed nurses to develop their own work schedule to meet their and the unit's needs so they could achieve a better work-life balance
- Introduced the new role of Mental Health Security Officer, who became part of the in-patient multidisciplinary team

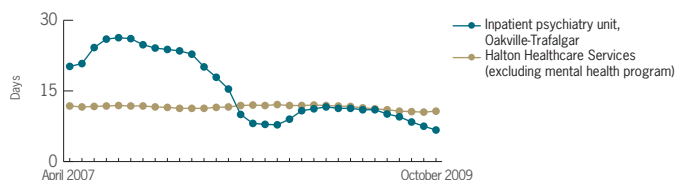
QI team:

The psychiatric unit's director, patient care manager, professional practice clinician and nurses participated in this quality improvement initiative.

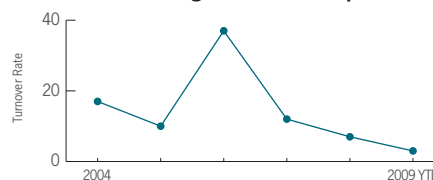
Results:

- Average staff sick days per FTE per year decreased to eight days from 16 between mid-2007 and December 2008.
- Staff turnover rates decreased to 3% from 39% between 2006 and 2009.
- Agency staff hours as a percentage of total worked hours decreased to zero hours from 9,426 hours between 2007 and 2008.
- Staff reported greater satisfaction with their supervisor, workplace safety and involvement in decision-making.
- Code whites and the use of physical and chemical restraints declined dramatically.

Average sick days per FTE per year*



Staff turnover rate, inpatient psychiatric unit, Oakville-Trafalgar Memorial Hospital



Next steps:

Psychiatric unit management continues to look for additional ways to support staff so they can handle the rising numbers of beds, patient volumes and severe cases — for example, by offering specialized training in areas such as concurrent disorders. With its newly stabilized workforce, the unit is working to further reduce its use of chemical restraints and is streamlining the clinical documentation required for mental health patient cases so nurses can spend less time on paperwork and more time delivering patient care. The mental health program has also developed care plans to ensure staff follow a consistent approach to aggressive client behaviour, and management will continue to participate in staff meetings and maintain a strong presence in the psychiatric unit.