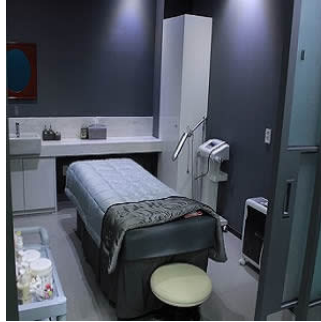## Safety culture

Creating a culture of safety within an organisation will have more chance of being successful when its leadership is totally involved. This has been shown by the experiences of Memorial Hermann Health System in Houston and the Seattle-based Virginia Mason Health System.

Clinical representation on the board of directors is critical for a health system that wants to get serious about a safety culture, according to Charles D. Stokes, RN, president and CEO at Memorial Hermann.

The health system also recognises clinical teams that lead the charge on safety with annual awards to promote accountability and recognise staffers who are committed to safety. For example, "certified zero" awards are offered to teams that had no adverse events over the course of the year. Since 2011, a total of 257 of the awards have been handed out in recognition of efforts to reduce hospital-acquired infections and other preventable errors.

Virginia Mason's safety culture transformation began in 2001, when system leaders realised that a physician-centred approach was not going to improve patient care, and instead they needed to take a patient-centred approach. The leadership first offered physicians a compact, which laid out clearly what the system expects from doctors it employs and what they can and should expect from Virginia Mason.

"We had to challenge our old paradigms," Virginia Mason's chairman and CEO Dr. Gary Kaplan said. "Physicians are instrumental in setting the tone, and unless the physicians believe we're on the right path we don't have the kind of alignment that will help us move forward."

The C-suite team then expressed interest in compacts of their own, and soon the board of directors wanted one as well.

The process was "foundational and fundamental" to improving safety, Dr. Kaplan said, as it aligned expectations among different groups.

"It was the groundwork and allowed us to create an understanding that we needed to better hold each other in our organisation accountable," he added.

Health systems or hospitals that want to build or improve their own cultures of safety must keep six "domains" in mind, according to a guide released by IHI/NPSF:

- Establish a compelling vision for safety
- Build trust, respect and inclusion
- Select, develop and engage the board
- Prioritise safety in selection and development of leaders
- Lead and reward a Just Culture
- Establish organisational behaviour expectations

The guide, which Kaplan and Stokes both contributed to, is intended to motivate and energise executives around the importance of improving safety.

Source: FierceHealthcare
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