Introduction: What You Will Find in This Module

Quality Improvement (QI) is a central theme in healthcare policy discussions and is crucial to value-based payment. Implemented badly, healthcare professionals may feel that QI efforts take considerable time away from patient care and provide limited benefit. Implemented well, QI supports your efforts to provide the excellent care you seek for your patients, empowers all staff, and increases your ability to manage practice priorities.

The transformation required to thrive in a value-based payment environment is more than a QI project – more than improving performance in one or two areas. Transformation requires changes across many dimensions of care, including implementing clinical improvement, training and supporting staff, and ensuring a strong business case for your practice. That said, QI is a foundational skill that enables your practice to achieve the changes necessary.

TCPI practices approached QI in several ways. There was broad consensus that practices with an existing QI approach in place should continue to use that approach if it is working well. For practices new to QI, selecting an approach from those used most commonly in health care, completing an initial training for key staff, and starting with a project likely to achieve an "early win" proved best.

In this module you will find guidance on choosing and implementing a QI approach. Visit the TCPI Change Package to view additional resources associated with this important aspect of practice transformation.

Build Quality Improvement Capability

Find Your Best Approach
From the TCPI Change Package:
2.2.1 Use an organized approach to identify and act on improvement opportunities.
The first step in using an organized QI approach is to choose an approach best suited to your practice. The two most common approaches used in health care are:
1. The Model for Improvement, which uses the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle to conduct repeated small tests of change and which focuses efforts on well-defined goals.
2. Lean Six Sigma, which focuses on the collaborative optimization of processes and removing waste.

These two approaches are not mutually exclusive: running PDSA cycles within a Lean project is common. Lean tools, such as process mapping and process standardization, are familiar to users of the Model for Improvement. Practice leaders should familiarize themselves with these approaches in enough detail to commit to a single model that will be used across the entire organization. Speak to colleagues and professional societies for advice and training in these models.

Effectively Train Staff in QI

From the TCPI Change Package:

2.2.2 Build QI capability and support the partnership of patients, families and staff in improvement efforts.

Once you have chosen a QI approach, you will need to train staff in how to use the tools and concepts it offers to improve care. QI training is available in-person and online. A few places to start include:

- The IHI Open School
- Your state's QIN-QIO
- Your professional society
- AMA StepsForward™
- ACPOnline®

Regardless of the QI approach you use, consider:

- Ensuring practice leader training, as they will need to evaluate progress and assess needs.
- Providing 1-2 staff with advanced QI training so they serve as a resource for others in the practice.

Use Your New QI Skills

From the TCPI Change Package:

2.2.3 Empower each staff member to innovate and improve within their own work environment and across the organization

QI capability is a "learn by doing" skill. Once you and other staff have participated in training, put those new skills to work. Expect a couple of things to happen as you begin:

- Some members of the practices will be more enthusiastic than others. Help everyone along by initially focusing on a few "early adopters," staff members excited to try the new ideas. By demonstrating how it works within your organization and how it can help improve things for all patients and staff, others will likely want to join.
- Don't be surprised if you need to adapt the QI skills you learned in training for your organization. It is more important that your approach works for you than it is to stick to every rule and guideline. Improvement is a complex, social activity. Stay true to the intent of your improvement priorities but allow for flexibility.
- Identify opportunities to plan and share results of your QI work, such as:
  - Build a QI update into every staff meeting.

- At daily huddles of the care team, briefly mention the impact of today's work on current QI work.
- Consider implementing a weekly "QI huddle," short, stand-up meetings where one or more projects teams discuss their work and problem solve.
- Work with practice leadership to recognize the staff members who have contributed to QI efforts.
- One-time support at an annual retreat is not enough; ongoing leadership reinforcement of the importance of improvement to the practice will make a difference.
- Share the results of all QI efforts with the entire organization at meetings, in newsletters, via email, or in other ways.

Enforce a Culture of Continuous Improvement

From the TCPI Change Package:

2.2.4 Actively participate in shared learning

Quality improvement is not a project that has a start and end date. Instead, it is a set of skills combined with a shift of practice culture toward continuous learning. To maintain and enhance QI capability, set aside time for yourself and other staff to collaborate with peers and external experts. Ideas include:

- Encourage leaders and staff members to teach others about QI: ongoing QI initiatives are always looking for best practices, examples from colleagues who have successfully improved. Search for state-wide initiatives similar to your work and make connections.
- Participate in meetings/programs sponsored by professional organizations. Most professional organizations now have improvement tracks at their conferences.
- Join local Collaboratives or learning networks. One idea for a small initial collaboration is to read the module on managing referrals and reach out to your referral/referring base to discuss optimizing information sharing and reliability.
- Use online forums to interact with peers outside the practice.

Happy Improving!