Rethinking Metrics for an Environment of Care Program

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All of us do not need to be reminded about the importance of Environment of Care (EOC) rounds and their impact on maintaining high standards for safety within the healthcare environment. Most organizations have developed processes for conducting rounds, standardizing checklists, and ensuring that any deficiencies identified are routed to the appropriate areas for follow-up and close-out. For the most part, organizations have also built out reporting metrics that can be used to provide insight into performance, including top deficiencies, status of open items and corrective actions, and total number of inspections conducted and deficiencies recorded over a specific time period. Even with this data, organizations are still left trying to determine whether or not they have established an effective Environment of Care program.

Faced with this question from one of our largest clients, we sat down with them to develop a dashboard that could provide deeper insight into their EOC program. Our goal was to review the data that they were already capturing and develop a cross-section of operational and quality metrics that could be used on a frequent basis to measure effectiveness.

To take an EOC program to the next level, organizations need to begin applying operational metrics to their evaluation efforts. These metrics should not only consider the standard metrics gleaned from EOC data but also begin to look at process metrics that can help drive overall performance improvement.

Seven metrics that should be considered as part of an operational dashboard can be divided into two areas: program delivery and program quality. These include:

Program Delivery Metrics
• PD1: All locations or departments are inspected at least one time per year
• PD2: Patient care locations or departments are inspected at least two times per year
• PD3: Deficiencies are closed out or addressed with an action plan within 14 days
• PD4: Average time for deficiency close-out

Program Quality Metrics
• PQ1: Senior management team member regularly attends rounds
• PQ2: Facility EOC rounds team members participate in weekly rounds
• PQ3: Improvement plans are developed for high-impact deficiencies on an annual basis

The program delivery metrics closely examine the operational aspects and processes associated with the EOC program. PD1 can ensure that rounds are conducted in all physical areas of the organization, while PD2

ensures that patient care areas are inspected more frequently. PD3 tracks deficiency close-out and alternative means to address larger issues via action plans, while PD4 can help organizations prioritize the prompt resolution of deficiencies.

The program quality metrics are focused on ensuring that the EOC program has continued visibility within the organization and that appropriate individuals consistently attend rounds. PQ1 targets senior-level executive participation in EOC rounds. Employees tend to demonstrate an elevated level of attention when senior executives make it a point to join weekly rounding. PQ2 ensures that appropriate personnel are attending rounds. The quality and consistency of EOC rounds are greatly enhanced when the correct subject matter experts are involved and are responsible for documenting deficiencies. Finally, PQ3 ties the EOC program to ongoing performance improvement. While it may be standard for EOC rounding to focus almost entirely on deficiency close-out and tracking, by including larger-scale performance improvement projects as part of the EOC program, an organization can target long-term changes to address systemic EOC issues.

In addition to identifying the proper metrics, effort should be made to ensure each metric has relevant performance targets and reporting mechanisms. Setting targets allows you to review performance and identify areas of opportunity within a program while pinpointing aspects of the program that could achieve higher success. An example of an EOC operational dashboard is shown below:

Metric	Metric Description	Target	Reporting Period
PD1	% of locations/departments inspected at least 1x per year	100%	Annually
PD2	% of patient care locations/departments inspected at least 1x per year	100%	Annually
PD3	% of deficiencies closed out or addressed w/action plan in 14 days	100%	Monthly
PD4	Average time in days for deficiency close-out	7 days	Monthly
PQ1	% of rounds attended by a senior management team member	90%	Monthly
PQ2	% of rounds attended by facility EOC rounds team members	90%	Monthly
PQ3	EOC data is trended, improvement plans for high-priority issues created	Two plans	Annually

EOC rounding is an essential part of the compliance framework, and its impact on the healthcare environment is well-documented. To their credit, many organizations have built consistent processes and mechanisms to maintain EOC programs. Those seeking to achieve the next level of success should consider implementing an operational dashboard that provides superior insight into their program and raises its overall visibility.