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Pathologist Speeds Up Lab Turnaround Time, Expediting Patient Discharge

“What a transformation! Speeding up our turnaround time has resulted in increased confidence in the lab and better doctor satisfaction.”

At the Pocono Medical Center in East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, Laboratory Medical Director Carmine J. Cerra, MD, FCAP, knew there had to be a better way to speed up test turnaround time.

Each day, the lab battled for years with the issue of test turnaround time for the morning labs—often frustrating fellow clinicians who could not get the test results until 9:00 AM or later. Not only was this turnaround time frustrating to clinicians, it also was frustrating to the patients who could not be discharged until the lab results were released.

Out of a need to assist in patient discharge, the lab director and staff began a Lean Six Sigma project aimed at the problem.

The end results have been better than expected. Today, the same lab produces all lab results for the critical care areas of the institution by 6:00 AM. All other patient results are ready to be viewed by 7:00 AM. Day in and day out, this is the new standard.

“We have been consistently meeting our goal 97% of the time for over three years,” said Dr. Cerra. “It’s been transformative regarding how the lab is perceived today. Speeding up our turnaround time has resulted in increased confidence in the lab and better doctor satisfaction.”

A simple streamlining of the turnaround time for the “AM” laboratory results has worked to change the perception of the lab, pleased clinical colleagues, and helped patients get home earlier.

“Doctors get their lab results two hours earlier, which results in some patients being discharged earlier,” Dr. Cerra said. “It’s been a win-win for the lab, our fellow clinicians, and most importantly, our patients, who want to get home as quickly as possible and are able to do so now with this better process.”

The details were published in one of the American Society for Quality’s journals in 2006 and presented at their annual meeting.