Strategic Operations Management

Client Company: Walgreens Boots Alliance

Redefining the Problem Statement

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Abstract

In my Operations Improvement Plan (OIP) I am working on quality at Walgreens as it pertains to privacy and dispensing. What practices and events have caused the company to face legal settlements with patients and their families? Where did the system processes and workflows fail in delivering on quality as it relates to both privacy and dispensing? As I review cases, events and what came of them I will work to get to the root cause and bring forward suggestions for improvement. As I begin my process I will bring into practice the fishbone diagram, from there I will lead into a standard process improvement diagram for before and the after recommendation. There is more work to be done I look to make both privacy and quality come together for Walgreens to fulfill their mission of being a health and well-being solution globally (Walgreens Boot Alliance, 2017).

**Introduction**

Walgreens merger with Alliance Boots in 2014 positioned the company to hold a global presence to become a convenient choice is health and well-being (Walgreens Boots Alliance, 2017). For the company to experience the brand recognition and continued growth they desire my client company will need to have increased awareness and practices as they relate to quality for those being served.

My client company experienced a lawsuit where pharmacy team members wrongfully access and used private patient information without a business purpose. In 2014, the event became public knowledge when the Indiana Court of Appeals found Walgreens guilty of a patient breach of privacy (Melnik, T., 2015). The event costed the company not only $1.4 million, but additionally both brand and community loyalty of businesses and customers.

Concerns of quality for my client company do not only come from privacy, but in dispensing accuracy. In 2007 Walgreens was found to have dispensed a medication that later resulted in the death of a patient (McCoy, K., 2007). Additionally, there have been other cases, not nearly as impactful as death, but concerning as it relates to quality. Patients have come forward in recent years with medication errors from the company who is looking to be a solution of health and well-being with their locations (McCoy, 2007).

In my paper I will bring forward a diagram and workflows – some before and after components. From the course reading I have been exposed to new process mapping to understand current state, and where we want to be, using the Fishbone Diagrams and Process Innovation Flowcharts (Russell & Taylor, 2017). The intent is to understand the processes designed and where they are breaking down in my client company. For Walgreens to continue to evolve it will be important quality is the focal point in the work being done in the over 13, 200 locations. My workflows are my initial beliefs from my reading as well the closing workflow placing accuracy and quality to deliver the best experience for the patients being served.

**Fishbone Diagram**

The below cause and effect diagram brings forward the areas concern and potential caused for Walgreens’s poor quality in patient privacy and dispensing practices being reviewed. Why are the events happening and how can Walgreens move forward with quality and trust?

**Graphical Flowchart -Before**

Below is the original flowchart created from the information provided from my research and previous course assignments, helping connect what was taking place at Walgreens in the form of privacy and dispensing errors. What is known from research would be errors of quality are happening and costing the company both financially and in branding. For Walgreens team members to be misusing access they have there is clearly a gap in their understanding in policies, procedures and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Findings elude to a need for authentication and policy review to help Walgreens team member understand and relate the work they do and how sensitive the subject is.



**Problem Statement**

For Walgreens to become the trusted health care destination on the corners around the world there needs to be stronger procedures in place to support patient privacy and accuracy in dispensing. Currently, Walgreens is facing increased challenges in patient privacy being accessed without a business need and accuracy in dispensing of medications, each subject to a component of quality. In the event Walgreens determines to not take corrective action in how they approach quality in their health care settings they will continued to face customer loyalty challenges, licensing practices will be at risk, and increased lawsuits from events occurring. A new approach on their emphasis on quality will bring solutions to the front, increase industry loyalty and enhance the reputation they are trying to build in health care, globally.

**Contributing Cause and Process Improvement**

One of the main areas of concern is the access Walgreens pharmacy team members have to the patient profiles and the ability to explore without a business purpose, limited monitoring. The flowchart also indicated the limited training and staff communication around the importance of patient privacy. Education and policy review should be completed annually to keep staff informed. With continued focus from Walgreens on quality and learning from events within their business and competition they will achieve market recognition. The company will need continued focus on process innovation. Russell & Taylor (2017) share process innovation to be breakthrough in design for rapid performance improvement. Process Innovation and health care quality align perfectly in my opinion. There needs to be continuous work being done to keep my client company moving forward- becoming best in class relating to quality in convenient health care around the world.

**Graphical Flowchart- After**

After reviewing the history of events and what was happening, the graphical flowchart is based is the outcome of the improved process, adapted from the original. One can see by adding in key elements to support privacy practices and accuracy dispensing Walgreens is positioned for better patient outcomes. The first area I will present on is the new process for accuracy at point of dispensing and point le for medication orders.



In accuracy component, I am recommending Walgreens uses the pharmacy system to create accuracy scans for medications. Here pharmacy technicians will select the medication from the data entry screen, scan the appropriate stock bottle and once done the system will recognize the correct NDC and allow the technician to move forward. In the event the wrong bottle is selected the system will error and not allow dispensing to move forward until the correct item is selected. Once the order is completed the pharmacist will verify by scanning the patient vial, opening to review the contents, at which point the contents should match the image on the pharmacist verification screen. Pharmacists at verification will also review the profile to see the bottle scanned matches the profile the system retrieved. Accuracy does not stop here, but continues to the point of sale. During the point of sale, the technician will verify the contents of the order inside the bag match each attached pharmacy receipt.

By taking a safety approach will help reduce, and ultimately eliminate the risk of error if the process is followed. Patients should not leave with another patient’s medication, or a medication not accurately dispensed. Logic will be setup for the orders coming into the system electronically to feed to the correct medication being ordered from the providers. At the point of visit providers will order medications, the selected medications will feed directly into the system- less error from not reading the writing, everything is digital, typed.

The next area of opportunity being recommended for change is patient privacy. Walgreens has been challenged with the access their pharmacy team members have to patient sensitive health information, and using it without business reason. To be the health and well-being destination the company needs to have a stronger position on quality as it relates to privacy as well. In the flowchart below I have brought forward a solution to keep privacy at the heart of quality care being delivered at Walgreens.



**Conclusion**

As I continue my research and Operations Improvement Plan I will continue to monitor what is taking place in the industry and Walgreens. To be the best in your category it’s imperative you watch the competition, and your business. Understand what is happening and how it impacts the direction my client company, Walgreens, is headed.

Walgreens partnered with EpicCare in 2015, where they gained access electronic health record information (“Walgreens Healthcare”, 2015). With growing access points it will be critical the company continues to have a commitment to privacy. Medical records are extremely sensitive, and hold a lot of patient information around their overall health state. In health care, with increased access, I believe the company will need to consistently monitor processes and look for areas of improvement. Use each event as an opportunity to explore, especially when it relates to patient quality and safety. As previously stated in earlier assignments, most can be accomplished by modifications to workflow and practices. Employee education and emphasis around quality in the work being done. When you process the order, you are signing off, sign the order with quality in everything being done.

Reference:

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