From the C-Suite » James Levett

A quality resource

Quality professionals can rely on ASQ for advice

U.S. healthcare spending will approach $2.4 trillion this year, approximately 18% of the gross domestic product. The topic remains at the forefront of the current political debate about the economy, particularly because costs continue to increase, and there is no concrete plan to increase efficiency and reduce waste. Healthcare institutions at all levels are seeking solutions to assist them in developing quality programs and making process improvements.

One resource available to healthcare providers is the American Society for Quality, an organization that represents quality professionals from all sectors. The ASQ was established in 1946 with a vision: “By making quality a global priority, an organizational imperative and a personal ethic, ASQ becomes the community for everyone who seeks quality technology, concepts or tools to improve themselves and their world.”

Long-term objectives of the organization have been to be stewards of the quality profession by providing value to both members and to society in general. The organization has maintained several strategic themes over the years proving and communicating the economic case for quality; assuring that a vital, growing body of knowledge is accessible to everyone; becoming the community of choice for quality; and growing the use and impact of quality in every segment of the economy.

The ASQ is governed by a 21-member volunteer board of directors and currently has more than 100,000 individual and organizational members worldwide. Healthcare is one of five industry-specific ASQ member divisions.

The ASQ administers the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award under contract to the National Institute of Standards and Technology, and the ASQ and members helped bring about expansion of the program to include awards for education, healthcare and not-for-profit organizations.

The ASQ healthcare division has approximately 3,500 members and has grown by 50% over the past four years. The ASQ healthcare division is committed to assisting providers in their efforts to reduce errors and eliminate waste, leading to improved performance, enhanced customer and employee satisfaction, greater reliability and increased profitability.

The ASQ believes that healthcare processes will benefit from the creative application of proven quality improvement practices such as Lean, Six Sigma, ISO 9001, Baldrige and others. By learning what works in industry and other sectors, improvements can be made in the key areas of efficiency, cost reduction and patient safety. The programs offered by the ASQ healthcare division address the needs of healthcare administrators and managers, quality assurance officers, patient-safety directors, chief medical and nursing officers, compliance personnel, risk managers, directors of quality management and improvement, clinical directors and managers. Many healthcare professionals who are interested in the latest improvement tools and management systems used in redesigning healthcare are now looking to the ASQ for the resources to make healthcare safer, more efficient, more reliable and patient-centered.

Of interest is the recent decision by the CMS to grant DNV Healthcare deeming authority to accredit hospitals using a program that integrates the ISO 9001 quality management system standard with the CMS conditions of participation required for all accrediting bodies. This concept of actually using a quality-management system in healthcare is relatively new, and should enable healthcare institutions to both deploy and sustain process improvements utilizing the variety of tools available to them through organizations such as the ASQ.

The healthcare division is currently planning the 2009 Quality Institute for Healthcare May 18-20 at the Minneapolis Convention Center in conjunction with the ASQ World Congress. The conference is titled “Building Better Performing Delivery Systems,” and will stress concepts of systems thinking and ways in which systems’ engineering principles may be employed in healthcare settings. Several sessions are planned in partnership with the Public Health Foundation. «

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