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The Sun Country Health Region is not only forging ahead with the Lean management systems for health care workers and facilities, but it has ramped up promotion of the program to the public.

Health care workers and the media alike will be attending one-day, eight-hour introduction sessions for Lean during the fall and winter months. It's part of a province-wide initiative to roll out Lean to health care workers.

"It's an overview of exactly what Lean is, and the Saskatchewan management system, and explains to them all the different tools and processes that they will eventually become engaged in, and the language that goes along with it," said Chris McKee, the executive director of the Kazien Promotions Office, and the coordinator for Lean with the Sun Country Health Region.

Lean is a system that creates value for health care dollars by cutting back on waste, he said. He believes there have been misconceptions about Lean, but he maintains that it works.

"People will read what they want to read, and they will hear what they want to hear," said McKee. "Maybe it's in the coffee shop or somewhere else, and then they make a decision that really isn't educated."

There have been questions in recent months on how much the provincial government is paying to consultants on the Lean systems, and whether the efficiencies gained through Lean will offset the consultant expense.

Lean isn't a new system, either. McKee claims it's been around since the 1800s, and it has proven to be successful.

Initiatives that have already taken place have focused on laundry and linens, and on surgical wait room patient flow.

McKee said the linen and laundry process resulted in an intensive, rapid process improvement project that ensured Sun Country's sites and wards have the right quantities, whenever and wherever they were needed.

Before Lean, McKee said one health facility could have too many linens, and another might not have enough.

The surgical flow projects focused on pre-operative clinics. They want to streamline the process, so that people only have to wait a minimal amount of time.

"We're making sure that you come in, get what you need when you need it, and have your surgery without the extreme wait times," he said.

Upcoming seminars will focus on such topics as reprocessing surgical equipment, so that when it's used, the equipment is returned in a timely fashion, and examined to ensure it's not contaminated or broken. McKee wants them to be cleaned and returned to sites.

"Another one is going to be around the discharge planning process, and ensuring that when you are discharged from any point of care within the region, that the point of care that you're going to has a flawless transition, so that there aren't any hiccups or waits, or maybe doesn't have the equipment that you need," said McKee.

Mistake-proofing projects have also occurred to ensure that there aren't any defects in the process, McKee said. Sun Country completed and sustained its venous thrombus prophylaxis, so that anyone who meets the criteria gets the treatment in a timely manner.

"An example of that would be a blood thinner," said McKee. "If you hit the criteria, you get the blood thinner that you need within 12 hours."

Those gains have been sustained for a year-and-a-half, he said. Sun Country wants to make sure that nobody passes away from blood clots while in care.

McKee said they also have some rapid process improvement workshops scheduled over the next eight months.

"They're a six-week, intensive, project-based process to improvement," said McKee. "So what it is, is we put a team in place, focused on a process that we see as impacting patient safety or care. We do data collection on past processes, and analyzing, and looking at the big picture."

Once they get to the final week, employees are in a position to take the existing process, redesign it, test the changes and roll out a new procedure.

McKee believes the health care system should be created around satisfaction and flawless care of patients, and when he needs care at a hospital, he wants wait times to be minimal, and to have zero risk of errors.