

Policy and Procedure Process; Bridging the Practice Gap
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Purpose: As healthcare reform takes shape across the United States, organizations are under increased pressure to maintain full compliance with new regulations, accreditation and evidence based practice (EBP) standards. One acute care hospital in Connecticut experienced this phenomena first hand during a recent Department of Public Health (DPH) review when findings revealed discrepancies in policy between departments, a deviation from EBP standards and inconsistencies in patient care. This review caused the organization to sharpen its focus on policy development, compliance and the accountability of its stake holders.

Research Question: What mechanisms should be incorporated into the development of a “Policy Management System” that facilitates a self- perpetuating review of regulations and EBP standards consistently?

Literature Review: A review of the literature provided recommendation for the components of policy development only. However a self-perpetuating “system” which inherently prevented discrepancies between policies or a drifting from EBP had yet to be identified or discussed.

Methods/Procedures: An interdisciplinary team (IDT) of experts from Operations, Compliance, Education, Patient Care Services, Pharmacy and Medicine came together to form a policy management workgroup. This workgroup eventually became the hospital’s first Policy Committee. However, the charge of the original IDT work group included determining best practice for policy management, creating a policy defining policy management, making recommendation for resource management, identification of barriers, and training of key organizational leaders to facilitate the new process.

Results: The IDT successfully developed a new “policy management system” which incorporated a self-regulating mechanism making it difficult for a policy to pass through the “system” with redundancies or while being in-conflict with another policy. Regulatory requirements, Evidence Based Practice standards, monitoring and a roll out plan were now part of this consistent systems approach.

Discussion/Application to Practice:

Policies in need of review, revision or creation were subjected to a systematic, interdisciplinary approach which resulted in compliance with regulatory requirements and EBP standards. Moreover, this approach simultaneously (1) bridged practice gaps, (2) improved organizational communications and most importantly (3) set the ground work for the paradigm shift required for cultural change. Mechanisms such an electronic document management system, reliable definitions [policy, procedure, protocol & guideline] and a comprehensive policy format with associated flow chart and approval check list were designed. Other important elements for the policy management system included leadership training, readily available subject matter expertise [interdisciplinary] and acceptance of evidence base practice standards.