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Leaning Toward Lean: Clear Thinking For Better Health(Care)

By Maya Talisman Frost

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Mindfulness is all about paying attention. It's amazing what can be accomplished when mindfulness is applied to systems that need all the attention they can get. If there's an industry that needs some CPR and TLC, it's healthcare.

Cindy Jimmerson is a 30-year trauma nurse who is passionate about streamlining healthcare processes. Her consulting company, Lean HealthCare West, is blasting through always-done-it-that-way thinking to reduce waiting time for patients, eliminate staff errors, and save hospitals and patients millions of dollars.

She is the Queen of Lean in hospitals, and she's on a mission to improve the health of our country's largest industry--\$1.76 trillion in 2002, and soon to explode as the baby-boomers hit their sixties.

When it comes to looking for powerful tools for transforming processes, we're fortunate to have a proven model that continues to outperform peers around the world. The Toyota Production System was originally developed by an American, W. Edwards Deming, who couldn't get anyone in the U.S. to pay attention to his approach. The Japanese listened and learned. Today, TPS continues to propel industries toward greater productivity, less waste, improved quality, and increased workplace appreciation.

Cindy's firm takes TPS straight to the ER and beyond. Now, you might think that a model focusing on getting product moved through the assembly line more efficiently is completely inappropriate for handling human patients. You would be dead wrong.

TPS focuses on adding value to what matters most--in this case, caring for patients. In doing so, it takes a hard look at every step taken which results in less contact with those who need care. The customer is king, and in healthcare, the customer is the patient. Instead of developing ways to make hospitals more profitable by relegating the patient to widget status, TPS restores the patient as the

primary focus. How refreshing!

There's a common misconception that people do not like change. I happen to love rearranging rooms every season. However, I'd probably get a little cranky if I walked into my house and found that someone else had moved all the furniture.

The real story is that people do not like change that is imposed upon them, but they appreciate being part of the solution. Employees using TPS love having the opportunity to creatively explore options that allow them to perform their work with greater efficiency. And why not? It helps them reconnect to the best parts of their job.

Toyota walks its talk. It would be one thing if the company had a policy of being "open to suggestions" while rarely making any changes. But Toyota consistently acts on its employees' recommendations. In fact, the most recent figures indicate that the company implemented 99% of its yearly total of over

700,000 employee ideas!

That same emphasis on valuing the knowledge and experience of employees and trusting them to develop better processes is the key to tackling healthcare's estimated waste—a whopping 50%.

TPS is mindfulness in action—paying attention to extra steps, inconvenient sequences, and indirect communication. The best part? Anyone can do it.

Doctors, nurses and other hospital workers are hard-working, compassionate people who are committed to providing their patients with top-notch care. Broken systems get in the way. Mindful management can repair those systems, and in the process, everyone wins.

Mindfulness at work? It works.

Talk to your doctor about getting lean.

Maya Talisman Frost is a mind masseuse offering specialized mindfulness training to individuals and corporate groups in the Pacific Northwest. To subscribe to her free weekly ezine, visit

. To learn more about lean healthcare, visit

Student Health Insurance

By Joseph Kenny

Health insurance is increasingly important. With the rate at which medical expenses have continued to rise over previous years, and the reductions in government funded health care programs, being without health insurance is less an option today than ever. Many young people have never had to think about health insurance as their parents have always taken care of this aspect of life for them. But for many

kids setting out for college, health insurance is one thing you can't afford to forget about. Be Aware

Everyone has specific health care needs, and young people often make the mistake of thinking they, as a group, do not need to worry about health care. While statistically, students may not be the biggest health care users, there are any number of unplanned events that can lead to you needing health care. If you don't have insurance you'll regret it. These can range from driving and sporting accidents, std's and other illnesses, and travel insurance needs. Whatever your specific needs, you might want to consider investing what's on offer as part of student health care plans. They will often provide the right balance between protection and affordability that students are looking for. Many students when they head off to college go out with the HMO network of their parent's insurance plans and this will be another reason to investigate student health insurance. Many schools and colleges will have some form of insurance available if students require it. You will have to pay of course, but often, because of the amount of insurance they buy, they can negotiate better deals and prices than you would otherwise be able to find.

They can also have terms and coverage that suit you and the activities and needs you are likely to experience most closely. As with all insurance though, shop around. Just because it's your college's plan, doesn't mean it's the best option available to you. There are as many insurance plans, as there are customers these days, so you should see what's available and make sure you are getting something you want and need before you hand over your money. Health Insurance

In other cases, your school will require you to have some form of health insurance. This may be a condition before you can enrol. If you cannot afford a full traditional health plan, a student insurance plan may be more affordable and will allow you to meet your school's insurance requirements.

Joseph Kenny is the webmaster of the insurance site

where you will find

information, news and links to the leading providers of insurance in the UK. If you found this article interesting you may find more articles of the same nature in the insurance guide located on site.

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