



Empowering Patients: Safety Success in a Streamlined Effort

DaVita Rolls Out Umbrella Program for Staff and Patients

When one of the nation's largest dialysis providers decided to focus its efforts on a new approach to patient safety, it looked first to its well-rooted and effective staff ("teammates") safety programs and built upon those successes.

"Safety shouldn't be exclusive to either teammates or patients," said Debra Hollister, DaVita's Director of Risk Management. "When we looked at *safety* as an overarching topic, we decided to approach it from a *hand-in-glove* perspective. It became obvious that we needed to incorporate both patient and teammate safety under one program. We believe if we impact patient safety we will see a direct correlation to teammate safety."

About 18 months ago, DaVita began to construct this woven approach to decrease adverse patient events and improve overall patient safety. This came on the heels of national attention to patient safety, particularly the Institute of Medicine's ongoing efforts to assess and improve quality of care, as well as the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' (CMS) safety focus. "We decided to ramp up our existing teammate safety program, combine it with patient safety, and create an umbrella approach throughout DaVita," Ms. Hollister explained.

How do you roll out and provide quality control on a program for 110,000 patients and 30,000 teammates located throughout 1,400 outpatient dialysis facilities? Identify a point person at each facility, provide specific direction and materials, and support the program with strong corporate-wide communication and technology. The success of this simple-sounding, streamlined approach, however, is based on a detailed turnkey program chock full of specific elements and procedures.

Safety Committee and Team Leaders

The program takes shape around a safety committee within each facility. Each committee has identified one Safety Team Leader (STL), who could hold any type of position—clinical, administrative or other support. The STL acts as the conduit for information and activities for both patient and teammate related safety topics and is on point for sharing this information with the teammates, both clinical and non-clinical, within their facility.

Turnkey Materials

The program's focus and tools all relate to CMS Conditions for Coverage. DaVita produces an annual calendar of safety topics; the calendar includes specific teammate and patient sections, which are correlated whenever possible. Each facility determines a plan to train teammates and educate patients on the monthly topic.

Teammate training, for example, typically is incorporated into daily "homeroom meetings," which provides a 5-10 minute forum for training all facility teammates on a variety of topics including the monthly safety focus. The meetings occur at the start of the day, ideally before patients are on dialysis. The STL may work through several of the bullet points provided in calendar and training materials, which may include staff-specific information as well as information that staff must communicate to patients. For example, discussion could focus on review of a related policy, new posters and the need to raise patients' awareness of the issue and posters, or review of procedures related to the safety issue of the month.

Clinical staff is then responsible for presenting the information to patients. Tools for staff and patients may include puzzles, quizzes, handouts, posters, and resources and literature (for staff). Turning the materials and lessons into effective training for staff and patients relies on the local staff's creativity to find both the time and fresh approaches.

"Time is always an issue," said Nancy Carl, FA, LPN, who manages two DaVita facilities in the Vero Beach, FL area. "We've learned to compress pieces into reasonable amounts, along the lines of the analogy that you can't

eat the whole elephant in one sitting! We try to make sure that we don't give patients too much information at one time, and by doing so, we better utilize our time with the patients. They might be getting safety information while they're getting vital signs checked, or getting on or off dialysis. We've really learned to streamline," she explained.

For both staff and patients, the routines of dialysis can become a barrier to education and safety, as people may become robotic in repetitive daily work. The safety program's success in Ms. Carl's facilities, for example, is buoyed by variety. Patients may hear about safety issues not only during different times of their treatment visit, but also in terms of delivery. Safety messages are delivered verbally, visually and by different staff members. "We change things up all the time," Ms. Carl explained. "We put posters in the areas where patients are weighed, or where they wash their hands and other places, and we change the visuals. What might not sink in the first time likely will the second time when we use a different visual aid or place the visual aid in a different place." Technicians, the social worker, nutritionist, or nurse might be educating a patient and/or calling attention to new posters on specific topics at any point of their visit. Varying the visuals and delivery of messages about flu shots, for example, has paid off. "I did four different flu postings this year, and each one brought two or three more patients to get their flu shots," she said.

Monthly Communications and Support

Specific direction and resources are provided in DaVita's monthly "*Village Safety and Health*" newsletter. Each newsletter issue is completely dedicated to that month's safety topic and includes all educational resources that the STL will need to implement staff training and patient education in local facilities.

STLs meet via monthly conference call, which are organized geographically. Calls are facilitated by members of DaVita's corporate safety committee. Depending on the topic reviewed during the call, experts are invited to these calls to share insight and training tips with the STLs. The STLs are given an opportunity to ask the *experts* questions regarding any of the information to be rolled out to facility teams.

In addition to the conference calls being a forum for training, they provide a key piece of quality control to ensure that local facilities are participating in the program. This mechanism is further supported by the area National Safety Managers, who provide ongoing Policy and Procedure updates, support and direction to the STLs.

Ms. Carl says that the safety program has brought awareness about overall safety to both patients and team-mates. "Appointing a STL who actively communicates and educates the team has led to increased awareness and support of a safe environment," she explained.

Results

The overall program was rolled out nationwide during 2008, with all facilities joining the effort over the course of the year. Topics addressed in 2008 were patient falls and blood loss prevention.

Based on the exponential growth of participation on monthly calls, anecdotally, the program is robust around the country. In areas where a facility's STL does not participate on a call, DaVita's corporate team works directly with that staff to ensure that the program is being implemented. As with any initiative, accurate data capture and reporting is always a primary concern. Because of several information technology modifications made to internal systems, data is not yet available; however, data collection and analysis is a focus for 2009. DaVita will modify the program, if needed, based on these quantifiable results.

In the two facilities Ms. Carl manages, however, the program's success is overwhelming. "In the past, we were lucky to have half the patients listening, but we now have 100 percent cooperation!" she said. The quality of the patient involvement is reflected in patient mentoring that is now the norm within those facilities. "We have empowered our patients to go to other patients when a new patient comes in and teach the rules, or to go to their own families with information. There is a lot of ownership, which is what has empowered patients. In two years, we've watched this safety program bloom into something that is spectacular," Ms. Carl boasted.

According to Ms. Hollister, DaVita is encouraging all teams to develop a "culture of safety" and emphasizing that "safety is *our* responsibility."