

A recent survey of hospital CEOs in the U.S. identified cost containment and the maximizing of revenue capture as top priorities. And given ever-growing industry emphasis on quality, hospitals must find ways to ensure best practice care comes at the lowest possible cost.

In the face of this finding, it may, on the surface, be counter-intuitive to suggest the engagement of an outside consultant in an effort to control costs, when an organization has already invested in qualified and competent service line leadership within the full-time work force. However, organizational leaders at the service line level are often consumed with day-to-day operations and, over time, are called upon to assume additional responsibilities.

The resulting dilution of work effort and diversion of attention means less time available to devote to the detailed evaluation, identification, and root cause analysis of operational inefficiencies that are directly and negatively impacting the organization's bottom line.

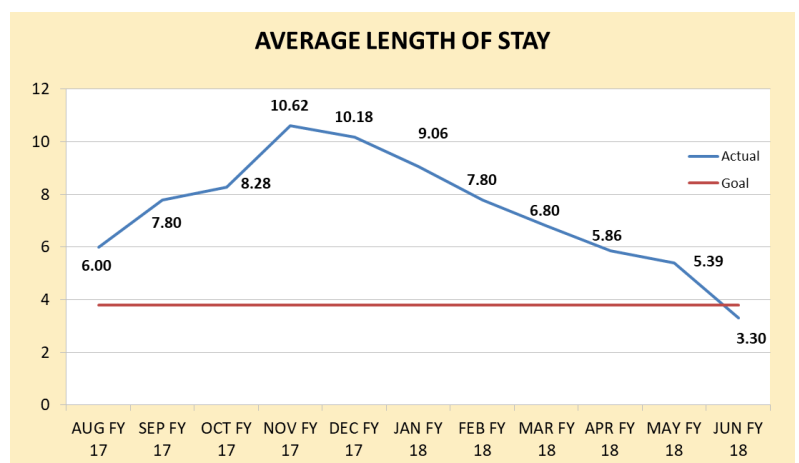
The role of a reputable consultant involved in rapid process improvement is not to become a long-term “pseudo hospital employee”. Rather, the consultant will work quickly and collaboratively with the team in place to identify those issues requiring correction as well as to develop an action plan that results in measurable improvement within a very short period of time.

Corazon was recently engaged to assist a mature TJC-certified Primary Stroke Program with a focused process improvement strategy. Treating over 1,000 strokes per year for the past five years meant that the Consultants had access to trended performance data that was invaluable in prioritizing the PI work to be done.

Evaluation of the outcomes data revealed three areas of concern, each of which correlated directly with the financial performance of the stroke program. The consulting effort greatly impacted the program overall:

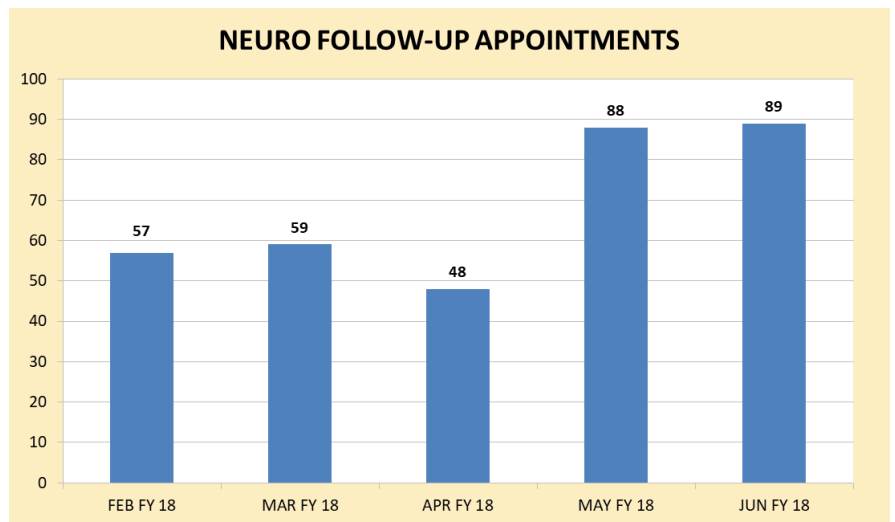
- Length of Stay:***

Patients with both stroke and TIA significantly exceeded the national benchmarks for LOS. Through a detailed and targeted rapid analysis, the multifactorial reasons for these excesses were identified and a corrective action plan was implemented. **Over a three-month period, LOS decreased to the target for stroke patients and by 1.5 days for the TIA population.**



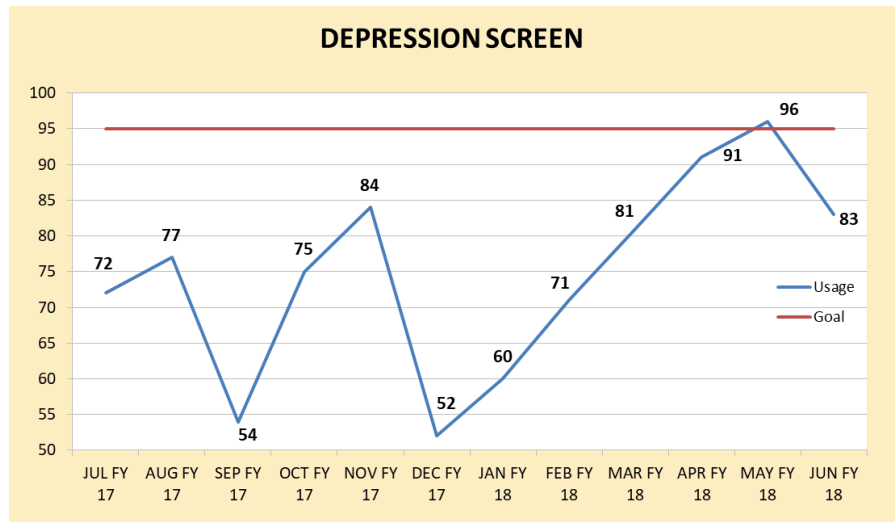
- Follow-up Appointments:*

Compliance with post-discharge follow-up was very poor—averaging only 48%—placing these complex patents at significantly increased risk for readmission. Again, a focused effort was made to identify the cause, as well as to implement a Corazon-led solution, which resulted in an increase to the compliance rate from 48% to 89% over 12 weeks.



- Depression Screening:*

This organization had been experiencing a long-standing challenge in achieving success in compliance with the Depression Screening requirement in Stroke. This poor performance was found to be the result of the involvement of multiple providers across many segments of the organization, all of whom had limited recognition of the reasons for and impact of poor performance in this area. Corazon provided physician education to streamline order sets, along with plans to implement a nationally-recognized peer review process.



The key to the effective and fiscally-responsible use of outside consulting services lies in understanding the limitations of existing staff, both in terms of professional capabilities and available time. **A focused, short-term engagement—especially one with well-defined deliverables and a firm timeline—can provide truly valuable and realistically workable solutions specific to an organization’s needs and goals.**

Corazon’s solutions are based on diverse expertise and varied experiences gained from multiple organizations over many years of practice. While the identified goal of any engagement of this type will be met, the associated benefits related to process improvement strategies, program assessment methodologies, workplan development, and physician engagement are skills and strategies that will serve any organization long after the engagement ends.

For a more detailed explanation of this Stroke Program improvement project that involved multiple components of Corazon's services, call 412.364.8200.