



Geriatric Surgery Verification
American College of Surgeons

GSV Insight: Developing Quality Improvement Projects

Sarah Valek, RN, MSN, MBA, BCPA
Manager, Clinical Quality Resources

INTRODUCTION

Michael Bencur [00:00:10] Hello and welcome to GSV Insight. Today we'll be talking about developing quality improvement projects. I am Michael Bencur, the GSV Project Manager, and today I am joined by Sarah Valek. Welcome, Sarah.

Sarah Valek [00:00:23] Good afternoon.

Michael Bencur [00:00:25] Can you tell us a little bit about yourself and your background?

Sarah Valek [00:00:28] Yes. Once again, my name is Sarah Valek. I am a critical care nurse by background in cardiac critical care and pediatrics, and have a special kind of place in my heart for quality improvement and taking a look at data to really drive local quality improvement as well.

Michael Bencur [00:00:49] Fantastic.

QUESTION #1

Michael Bencur [00:00:49] Moving on to our questions. The ACS has recently released a quality framework and toolkit for hospitals to utilize in planning, conducting, and evaluating quality improvement projects. Can you talk about how and why this was developed?

Sarah Valek [00:01:07] Yes. So, the ACS Quality Framework was recently released at the ACS Quality and Safety Conference this past July. The purpose of the quality framework is to improve quality improvement with the aim of helping hospitals improve their ability to plan, conduct, evaluate, and report on quality improvement projects submitted across all of our ACS quality programs. The framework consists of eight components. Each has criteria that are critical to include in any quality improvement project that you might be conducting. The framework also helps quality improvement teams ensure their projects are comprehensive and effective. It also will guide your team into writing a detailed and thorough report on your own quality improvement work. And the framework is not a methodology. It can be used in tandem with any existing quality improvement methodologies that you may be using in your hospital, such as Lean or Six Sigma. So, the ACS Quality Programs include a quality improvement element in their standards. However, quality improvement standards typically have the highest rate of deficiency in accreditation of verification programs. So, this is really why the ACS Quality Framework was developed.

In February of 2021, a cross-College committee led by Dr. Clifford Ko, Director of ACS Division of Research and Optimal Patient Care, Dr. Avery Nathens, Medical Director of ACS Trauma Programs, and Dr. Heidi Nelson, Medical Director of ACS Cancer Programs, with other experts from the ACS Quality Programs, was formed. This group evaluated 50 projects from program participants to understand how quality

improvement is being conducted by other various teams across the quality initiative programs. All the studies were reviewed from 2019, and they were all in pre-COVID. These reviews concluded that there were definitely opportunities for improvement in the project planning and project documentation, and this team developed a framework to guide hospitals in their quality improvement work. When taking a look at quality improvement, we talk about the three phases of quality improvement itself. So, the ACS developed the framework to match these three phases. The goal was really to guide frontline surgeons, RNs, quality teams, and surgical teams in the planning, conducting an evaluation of their quality improvement work and projects. This framework is specifically designed for small scale surgical improvement efforts. We talk about national initiatives in quality framework and quality projects, but this is really looking at your local hospital and really taking a opportunity to take a deep dive into local improvement efforts.

The framework is organized around three phases of quality improvement. We talked about those earlier, the planning, conducting, and reflecting. So briefly for planning, it's the effective improvement plan begins with the planning phase during which your quality improvement team can assess what is your current situation to determine what your project focus would be. You can start then building an implementation plan and develop strategies to put your plan in place. Next phase of quality improvement is conducting. It is in the conducting phase where you develop a plan of action to successfully implement your project. This is really the workhorse of your PI. You're going to evaluate results in regular intervals utilizing data, and it's that data is really going to be key to the success of your project during this conducting phase. And then lastly, you're going to continue through the reflecting phase. It's crucial to share your results, your lessons learned back to your stakeholders, and you want to overall, you want to be, to contribute to the culture of quality improvement by publishing these results as you find them. So how does this all help you? Really, the goal of all this was to give you each structure and tools to have successful QI projects of your own. So, this is not required for participation in the GSV Program or any of our quality programs, but it's intended to be a tool and resource for you all when conducting QI.

QUESTION #2

Michael Bencur [00:05:31] Thank you for sharing that thorough background. Is the ACS Quality Framework and Toolkit available to anyone to use? And what other quality resources does the college have?

Sarah Valek [00:05:42] Yeah, so the ACS Quality Framework and tools are really available to anyone. They're available on our FACS website under quality improvement. You can easily find them there, and the tools that are included with the Quality Framework Toolkit really start with three main elements, a project charter, a communication plan, and a data plan. So, we'll talk about each of those. Um, in brief. The key to any successful project is a project charter. This is going to be a document that defines the objectives, the scope, and then the stakeholders that you've really engaged for your project. It's a roadmap for the team to follow, and it's the foundation of a successful project. It offers clarity and direction to a team and ensures that everyone is on the same page. Using a project charter gives you structure of documentation for everyone to review the key components of the actual work, to gain buy-in from everyone involved, and to identify potential pitfalls so you can address those early.

The next document is a communication plan. We really wanted to give hospitals an opportunity to connect frontline staff with executive leadership between residents, attendings, or any structure of staff that you have in your hospital. A communication plan is a valuable tool because it ensures a clear, consistent messaging to all your stakeholders and addresses when they would receive that information. The purpose of this is to communicate not only with stakeholder groups, but it might also be a collaborative that you're working with, perhaps persuading additional buy-in from across hospital departments, or simply just

informing hospital staff.

And the third and final piece of the toolkit we're going to talk about today is a data plan. QI projects are all about the data. We gather it, we analyze it, we measure it. A data plan ensures that you have the right pieces of your data to collect and what is required that's actually going to show program growth and success. It's a document that lists the what, the how, and the why for your data. And it's essentially a project charter for your own data. And then finally, we have a framework note taking tool. It's essentially a great place to start to download this tool, and it will really get you started in your quality improvement project planning. It contains an additional column for you to make notes and add different elements of your project as they come to fruition with your team. Once again, getting started is for utilizing the quality framework. You can visit the quality framework webpage and download the framework and the toolkit itself.

Some additional resources that we have available are in the ACS Quality Improvement Basics course. The basics course is offered online, and the course includes six modules, introduction to quality improvement, the quality improvement process, data measurement and analysis, change management, patient safety, leadership and teamwork. It's a great opportunity to offer knowledge. You receive a workbook of activities, infographics and application activities to really give you a great summative basis of how to conduct and analyze your QI. The cost is about \$249, and it is eligible for CME credit. And we do encourage you to also check out this valuable resource. The College has also released a case study repository, and in the case study repository, you may search and look under different quality verification programs across the College to spur ideas and get other insight as to what other hospitals are doing across the nation with their QI projects.

QUESTION #3

Michael Bencur [00:09:38] Wonderful. And what are some tips for success when it comes to developing quality improvement projects with limited resources and staff?

Sarah Valek [00:09:46] So this is a question we get a lot. I mean every hospital is really trying to work more effectively, more efficiently, and resources are limited. So, we really have developed this framework and toolkit for you to first download and use. That's why it is available to everyone on the FACS website, but some tips to actually get started with you utilizing these resources, we like to also share some strategies or ideas to really kind of meet that standard and plan, conduct your annual QI. So, some tips for success are really to start by making a plan. You want to take a look at what that plan and that project charter would encompass and dive in and really make that initial thought intentional and really look at your key stakeholders. We also recommend to really keep it simple, it's easy to jump in and want to take a national initiative, such as diabetic care with hemoglobin A1C monitoring or an ambulation protocol, but you really want to keep it simple and look at a local need in your own hospital. Take a look at your data, take a look at what might be contributing to that data and talk to your staff. What really are some pain points that they're experiencing? How can you do a quick root cause analysis and really dive in and prioritize an important QI project? And then also we encourage you to communicate, you've identified as part of this process, a project that you want to take on, you want to communicate with key stakeholders, get their buy-in, get their support, and they may even come along with you and assist you in that execution of the plan.

Really recommend that you don't fly solo in this. This needs to be a team effort. One person conducting these quality improvement projects really do meet challenges. You want to gain buy-in from others. They

may have other reasons for wanting to really engage in a QI project for maybe not their own work but might be an academic reason or for an outside committee. It's really important once again to look at your resource utilization. What resources do you have available to you to conduct this quality improvement initiative? Are there financial things that you will need? Are there staff time? What data are you needing from either internally within your department or another department? It's also great to remember to capitalize on any momentum when you start gaining momentum within your quality improvement efforts, it's great to really want to keep that going. You want to find others who maybe are also excited about this topic and have them join you in this process. And then lastly, you really want to make a plan to sustain this change. You've collected your data, you've looked at your communication plan, your key stakeholders have all been informed, now you want to learn how can you sustain and make a plan for that? Are you going to accept the change that you made? Are the interventions appropriate? And so forth. So, we really want to take this opportunity at the college to really address a need for improving improvement. We hope that these key framework tools and resources are helpful. We are also available here to support you in your individual QI efforts.

CLOSING REMARKS

Michael Bencur [00:13:09] Thank you so much, Sarah, for that thorough introduction to quality improvement projects and the ACS Quality Framework. Sarah's contact information is up on the screen and the link to the [ACS Quality Framework](#) is in the video description below. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to her. Thank you again for joining us, Sarah.

Sarah Valek [00:13:29] Thank you so much, Mike.

Michael Bencur [00:13:30] And I hope you all have learned as much as I have today. If you would like to share your GSV implementation strategies, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at mbencur@facs.org. Thank you.