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## **Assisting middle managers to fulfil their clinical governance role: a model for enabling ownership of quality improvement (QI) programs**

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### **Objective:**

This study developed a model for enhancing the middle manager role in hospital clinical governance and improvement.

### **Methods:**

Healthcare organisations have not traditionally pursued the development of the middle manager role in implementing senior management policy, such as clinical governance, in a systematic way. Yet their accountability for safety and quality is increasing with societal, professional and governing body expectations. This research, undertaken towards a PhD, reviewed the literature on healthcare middle managers, with a focus on what motivates them to embrace safety and quality improvement as part of their role. The literature review provided the foundation for the intervention, a model for enabling hospital middle manager ownership of the quality improvement program, to be implemented via a case study-based action research project combining pre and post quantitative and qualitative data collection. The project ran over 12 months in an Australian specialist metropolitan teaching hospital, and involved a volunteer group of middle managers in planning and taking control of the hospital quality program for 12 months. The key measures used were qualitative and quantitative information on middle manager attitudes to the hospital improvement program and levels of organizational QI implementation using internal and external measurement tools. Qualitative and quantitative results resulted in the refinement of the model.

**Results.** Quantitative and qualitative survey results compared between years one and two showed that middle manager understanding and ownership of the QI program increased significantly, although their perceived enjoyment of being involved in QI decreased. There was also a significant drop in numbers of participants who believed it was easy to communicate across the organisation. There was significant improvement, however, in the middle managers' perceptions of the support and empowerment they received from the Executive, their feelings of accountability and ownership of the QI program and their understanding of the QI process. Organizational QI implementation increased as measured by the hospital Executive using an external and internal scale. Three ranking questionnaire items addressed motivation and enablers to assist middle management be further involved in QI, as well as middle manager role values. A ranked list of each of these was able to be distilled which assisted in further refinement of the model.

### **Conclusions:**

Despite the relatively short action period under study, project results indicate that the implementation of this model was successful in bringing senior and middle managers together to improve organizational QI implementation levels. It also appears to have countered, to some extent, the negative effects that the typical hospital professional bureaucracy structure can have on QI programs, as the middle managers worked effectively across professional boundaries to implement the QI program. The model roll-out showed it to be fundamentally useful as an approach to enabling and motivating staff to become more involved in QI, and even to drive it. Some adjustments were made to the order in which the model dimensions were rolled out, and elements of each model dimension were refined in light of observing the middle managers' experiences, but the foundation structure did not change.

Middle managers can, and will, take ownership of the QI program, given the guidance and opportunity, and over twelve months in this project were able to make some significant improvements to perceptions of and involvement in the program across the organization. The project demonstrated that a middle manager group can integrate peer feedback and their intimate understanding of their organisational role to successfully design QI approaches that are positively received. The proposed model provides a framework within which to approach this, distilling the critical elements required to maximize the chance of success.