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Provincial supply chain work focuses on product issues resolution

Saskatchewan's healthcare system purchases and consumes millions of healthcare products each year. In most cases, the syringes, scalpels, latex gloves and more complex items such as intravenous pumps and heart monitors all work according to expectation. But what happens when they don't? The failure of medical products to perform can pose a serious threat to patient safety and must be addressed quickly and effectively.

Since 2012, the health regions, the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency and 3sHealth have been working with clinicians to improve the identification and resolution of product issues. While all organizations have processes for reporting and resolving problems with medical products and equipment, a standard provincial response to communicate and resolve these issues was not in place until recently.

"We had the right people in the room and together we got the results we needed in a short amount of time," said Val Klassen, director of supply chain at 3sHealth about the collective work of health system partners. "I couldn't be happier with our work together and with the direction we're heading."



Clinicians and materials management professionals from across the province working with 3sHealth's clinical advisory and provincial contracting teams are creating a provincial solution for identifying, prioritizing, communicating and resolving product issues.

The work began with a two-day face-to-face planning event in June 2015. A large group of representatives from the

provincial materials management committee and the provincial clinical advisory committee came together with the 3sHealth teams to discuss the current state and brainstorm a better

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way forward. Participants identified gaps in the way things are done now, discussed and developed a desired future state, identified priorities and created a 2015-16 action plan.

In September, the work continued when a cross-functional team came together to develop and implement standard work to create consistent provincial processes. By the end of the two-day event, the group had successfully created provincial tools and work standards for product issue identification, prioritization, and resolution as well as a plan to communicate and educate others on their use. Training on the tools and standards will occur in October.

One important feature of the new tools is the incorporation of a “risk ranking matrix” while tracking product issues. This will automatically signal users of any recurring risks that will arise as information is reported on a provincial level. The group was also able to agree on standard time periods for resolution by vendors and indicators for when an issue would need to be escalated.

“I’m proud of the collaborative, standardized process we built for dealing with product concerns that can be tailored to meet the needs of all regions and SCA, says Kara Cote, manager clinical equipment and product standardization for Saskatoon Health Region. “These improvements are vital to ensure consistent and safe handling of product concerns as they relate directly to patients/residents. It’s wonderful to see the high quality work that can result from sessions such as these that 3sHealth coordinated.”

Further work in the supply chain area continues. A provincial item master list, or inventory, is being developed. This will itemize all products being used by the health system in the province. An important part of this work is the creation of a standard naming convention to be used for the provincial master list. Saskatoon Health Region will be playing a leading role in this work.

“The provincial common item master file is a massive undertaking, comments Mike Losie, materials management coordinator for Saskatoon Health Region. “While it will be extremely complicated, it is essential for our provincial plan. We only have one chance to get this right so we want to ensure that both our research and our work leave no stone unturned.”