

Lab Quality Confab 2008

on Quality Management in Diagnostic Medicine

BEST ELEMENTS

I spent a good portion of the first day trying to conceptualize the direct relationship between LEAN, Six Sigma and ISO “process” thinking.

On September 24th I found the following comment by Tanya Pate (Quest Diagnostics, Miami) very enlightening: *ISO 9000 is a mile wide and a foot deep, while Six Sigma is a foot wide and a mile deep.*

My “aha!” moment occurred on September 25th during the plenary session focusing on ISO 15189 accreditation. Two speakers made comments that precipitated this.

1. Ruth Jaeger (Eastern Ontario Regional Laboratory Association, Ottawa) said that quality is not intuitive - that you need to learn it and *change your laboratory’s lifestyle.*
2. Benita Haines (Piedmont Medical Laboratory, Winchester) said that understanding LEAN gave staff the tools to implement necessary projects to achieve accreditation to ISO 15189, but that ISO thinking provides an understanding of operational processes that is necessary *before* embarking on LEAN or Six Sigma projects.

Having heard this, I now share with colleagues that:

- ISO provides *a mile wide and an inch deep* cultural framework of process thinking that brings about a Quality Management System to guide operations. This is true whether you are a corporation seeking ISO 9000 certification/registration, or a medical laboratory seeking accreditation to ISO 15189.
- When opportunities for improvement are identified, LEAN and Six Sigma are *an inch wide and a mile deep* project tools to reduce waste and improve efficiency.

Thank you Lab Quality Confab for crystallizing my understanding of the relationships between LEAN and Six Sigma tools and ISO “process” thinking! I look forward to gazing into your crystal ball at next year’s confab.

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