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A Study of Leading Indicators for Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems in Healthcare

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Title : A Study of Leading Indicators for Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems in Healthcare

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Subtheme : 2. Creating cultures that minimize aggression and violence

Abstract : Background & Context: Healthcare workers face many occupational health and safety hazards every day, including workplace violence. The cost of violence in Ontario hospitals is .8 million annually, making up 10% of lost-time injuries (Government of Ontario, 2015). While the awareness of the problem is growing, policies and practices have lagged behind (CFNU, 2017). An approach to changing this trend is the utilization of leading indicators within Occupational Health and Safety Management

Systems (OHSMSs). In contrast to lagging indicators, which focus on outcomes retrospectively, leading indicators are associated with proactive activities. Using leading indicators is common in other industries; however, this shift has not occurred in healthcare. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the feasibility of implementing interventions guided by six leading indicators (senior management commitment, continuous improvement, communication, competence, employee involvement, occupational health management), and the effectiveness on improving selected health and safety workplace indicators.

Methodology: A quasi-experimental longitudinal design was used within 2 acute care hospitals. Phase I focused on assessing current OHSMSs using the leading indicators, identifying possible leading indicators to be added or changed, and determining potential facilitators and barriers. Phase I concluded with developing tailored interventions based on identified gaps and in collaboration with each site. Phase II pilot tested and evaluated the interventions. Data was collected pre- and post-intervention with interviews to assess feasibility, and surveys to assess effectiveness.

Findings: The interventions focused on improving elements related to 3 leading indicators: employee involvement, senior management commitment, and communication. Regular ‘Safety Rounds’ were implemented to engage staff in discussions with senior management related to health and safety (including workplace violence), areas needing improvement and possible solutions. Communication was bolstered through newsletters and bulletins focusing on leading indicators. At Site 1, pre- and post-survey data showed employees’ perceptions of safety culture decreased, while at Site 2, employees’ perceptions improved. Data from the post-interviews provided positive feedback about using leading indicators as a proactive lens to assess OHSMSs. The interventions also provided a framework for ‘safe’ discussions about workplace safety (including workplace violence), encouraged senior leaders to obtain first-hand experience of issues, and strengthened the support for health and safety as a strategic priority. Barriers during the interventions included competing priorities, workload, and organizational culture.

Implications: Healthcare workers have a right to work in safe workplaces, free from all forms of violence. It is the responsibility of employers to try to mitigate, and ultimately eliminate, workplace violence hazards (CFNU, 2017). Our study examined one promising approach to creating safe workplaces and the results will inform employers on the feasibility of implementing leading indicators into current OHSMSs.

- Learning objectives: :**
- 1) Participants will have an understanding of the assessment and utilization of leading indicators associated with proactive activities within occupational health and safety management systems.
 - 2) Participants will be aware of potential barriers and facilitators to implementing interventions to increase the use of leading indicators in health care organizations.
 - 3) Participants will be able to discuss the feasibility of implementing leading indicators to support a safety culture across health care organizations.

