

Vanderbilt University Medical Center Embraces the Value of Shared Learning

Highly reliable organizations are never satisfied. A constant quest for improvement is hard-wired in their DNA.

For Vanderbilt University Medical Center, actively participating in the Tennessee Surgical Quality Collaborative (TSQC) and larger American College of Surgeons' National Surgical Quality Improvement Program (NSQIP) allows the renowned academic health system to share its expertise while simultaneously learning from colleagues – large and small, urban and rural – across the state and nation.

Oscar Guillamondegui, MD, surgeon champion for VUMC and past chair of the TSQC Leadership Committee, said, "It's the celebration of ideas that is so important ... putting our pride in our back pocket and doing what's best for the patient is probably one of the best outcomes from the program. We're learning from each other so that all patients benefit."

He noted the TSQC started as a 'back-of-the-napkin' kind of idea in 2008 spearheaded by four physicians from across Tennessee – Joe Cofer, MD of Erlanger; Bill Richards, MD and Dan Beauchamp, MD of Vanderbilt; and Leonard Hines, MD of the University of Tennessee. "It worked out to be the right place at the right time," he added of launching the ambitious initiative.

Today, 22 Tennessee hospitals have joined the collaborative, which is staffed by the Tennessee Center for Patient Safety under the umbrella of the Tennessee Hospital Association. The TSQC's mission is to identify and share best surgical practices through an open discussion and transfer of information in order to drive outcomes and improve patient care.

Learning From Each Other

Vanderbilt University Medical Center's Barbara Martin, RN, MBA, CCRN, who has oversight of data analysis at Vanderbilt and is part of the TSQC Leadership Committee, said it would be easy to think smaller facilities have the most to gain, but that isn't necessarily true. "Sometimes it's easier to change things in smaller places than in larger hospitals so I've learned a lot." She added the TSQC quarterly meetings often introduce new ideas and viewpoints. "Almost inevitably, someone will bring something up, and we'll all go 'Oh yeah ... why didn't I think of that?'"

Sheree Levering, RN, Vanderbilt's surgical clinical reviewer (SCR), agreed the collegial relationship that exists between TSQC members is

vitaly important to overall outcomes. "The SCRs gained a great support system in the TSQC," she said. "We have a cohort of peers with whom to discuss ideas and issues ... and that is so valuable for not only the data collection but also for improvement opportunities and projects."

Martin added, "Different hospitals have different pressure points. We all learn from each other. Where else could you pick up the phone and call Cookeville Regional to ask about infection rates? This is really one of the only venues we have to be able to do this."

Scaling Knowledge Statewide

Shared insights aren't limited to the immediate collaborative members, however. "Other hospitals garner the benefit of the knowledge from the TSQC," said Guillamondegui. "TSQC participating hospitals manage over 60 percent of the general surgery cases in the state, but the impact is much greater statistically so that all Tennessee patients benefit," he noted of communicating process improvement steps and results data to a much broader audience through a variety of channels including Tennessee Hospital Association conferences and specialty society meetings.

"I think we're a voice from these (participating) hospitals and health leaders that has something to offer not only to each other but to healthcare as a whole," he said. "The group, as a whole, has the energy and the power to make changes across the state."

Guillamondegui concluded, "We are continually trying to drive toward zero bad outcomes, but there are always going to be areas we need to improve. Being able to do this together and to share best practices is really the most beneficial part of the collaborative and leads to improved patient outcomes."



Oscar Guillamondegui, MD and Barbara Martin, RN, MBA, CCRN, along with Sheree Levering, RN, lead Vanderbilt's efforts with the TSQC. In addition, Guillamondegui and Martin are part of the leadership committee for the statewide collaborative.



The Tennessee Surgical Quality Collaborative is made up of more than 20 hospitals and health systems across the state and represents approximately 1,500 surgeons. TSQC is a collaboration of the Tennessee Chapter of the American College of Surgeons, member hospitals, and the Tennessee Hospital Association's Center for Patient Safety, which serves as the coordinating center.