

Kaizen

Kaizen is a Japanese concept that, loosely translated, means “continuous improvement”.

It comes from two words: Kai, meaning “change”, and Zen, meaning “ideal state”.

This means to break down or change the current situation and then build it into the ideal state. Kaizen!

The principle is at the heart of the philosophy that has made Toyota and others, including [Virginia Mason Medical Center](#), so successful and sustainable.

It's about getting front-line staff to approach problem solving and root cause analysis from a different, ceaselessly inquisitive perspective.

Two of the key concepts of kaizen are:

- standard work, and
- observation

Standard work

Standard work is the current best way to perform a task, and forms the baseline for the continuous improvement of kaizen.

It specifies:

- What needs to be done to complete a particular task
- How that work should be done, and
- How long the process should take

No two hospital patients are the same but they all go through similar processes and we want them all to experience the same high quality as they do.

Agreeing standard work is the first step towards improvement. If there isn't a standard, how will we know if we have improved it?

Standard work forms the baseline for kaizen, and as the standard is improved the new standard becomes the new baseline for further improvement again. Improving standard work is a never-ending process.

The other benefit of standard work is as a guarantee of quality – if we deliver standard work (completing a task in the right way and in the right time), then it is likely that the outcome to the process will be a high-quality one.

Observation

Two of the main ways in which kaizen seeks to continually improve standard work are by removing waste from the process and dismantling barriers to achieving the best possible results every time.

That is achieved by careful observation of the standard work being undertaken to identify where waste and barriers are occurring and what the causes of them are.

Only when we understand that can we begin to make changes and start to improve.

The Kaizen team

The Kaizen team has a big remit: to support staff with their expertise to implement a range of improvement projects across the hospitals.

Building on the work of the Improvement Academy, the team of improvement practitioners will support colleagues and help them develop the right skills to implement their own improvement ideas. It helps staff throughout the trust develop the skills they need to drive continuous improvement in their own departments.

The Kaizen Office was established to implement the Patient First Improvement System (PFIS) that will support staff to learn and adopt a range of Lean working methods that will help them make sustained improvements in line with the objectives of True North.

The team is also building capability across the trust by providing Lean training to more than 1,000 members of staff and developing wider Lean awareness sessions for annual and induction training.