

**Name of Organization**

WellSpan Health

Healthcare Organization Type

Health System

Client Since

2009

Products

Feedback, Risk

Key Challenges

- Just culture model not widely adopted
- Hard to distinguish between errors caused by bad systems vs. human error
- Training 700+ managers in just 3 months

Key Benefits

- Documentation in Risk helps identify system failures
- Buy-in from managers and physicians for just culture model
- Following manager training, almost 30% of reports have just culture documentation attached

Client Website

www.wellspan.org

**CLIENT CASE STUDY**

WellSpan Health

Risk management software helps promote system-wide just culture

The Challenge: Establish and entrench just culture at WellSpan Health

The majority of medical errors are the result of poorly designed systems, sub-optimal processes and working conditions—not the ‘bad’ behavior of staff. Just culture is an approach that recognizes this reality and works to create a safety-supportive system of shared accountability. There are two basic premises of this system: management is accountable for good system design and staff members are accountable for the quality of their choices within the system. For example, management is responsible for the location of a hand gel stations but hospital staff are responsible for cleaning their hands properly, according to hand hygiene guidelines.

WellSpan gained approval to approach just culture as a strategic initiative in its facilities in 2009. Its patient safety team conducted full-day training for more than 700 managers over three months, followed by half-day training for physician leaders. However, they needed a tool to document just culture interventions to ensure that problems were being identified—and fixed. They decided to modify their existing risk management system, Risk by RL Solutions, to capture just culture documentation as part of an incident report.





Organizational Snapshot

WellSpan Health is an integrated health system which serves more than 650,000 people in south central Pennsylvania and northern Maryland, including several major metropolitan areas such as Baltimore, Washington and Philadelphia. WellSpan is dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of the people it serves with more than 65 patient care sites. As a non-profit organization, WellSpan provides more than \$18 million each year in uncompensated medical and outreach services.

The organization includes two respected hospitals: York Hospital and Gettysburg Hospital, with a total of 614 beds. WellSpan also includes six retail pharmacies, a home health and hospice provider, 47 primary care and specialty physician practices and 10 outpatient health centers, including the second most highly utilized outpatient surgery center in Pennsylvania.

The Solution: WellSpan Health modifies RL Solutions' risk management software to promote just culture

Gary Merica, a patient safety officer at WellSpan Health, modified the Resolution/Outcome screen (the final screen of an incident report) and added a field called "Just Culture Documentation". When a manager clicks on this field, it opens a dialog box with several checkbox options. The manager must indicate the extent that system design and staff behavior had in the incident, and describe their follow-up actions (i.e., did the manager console, coach or discipline the employee or was no action taken).

In addition to the checkboxes, managers are asked to provide outcome notes and follow-up recommendations to support their findings. While there was some work involved in configuring the Risk system to accommodate just culture documentation, RL Solutions' software is so

customizable, adding fields like this is easy. In this case, Gary used the tools and training that RL Solutions provides all of its clients to rename unused fields on the standard Risk forms.

Additional initiatives to support just culture

The patient safety team regularly sends out incidents to managers that involve medication errors or other adverse events, and ask them to use the tools they learned in just culture training to investigate and evaluate. The team sends out an answer key a couple of days later with what the correct action would be under the just culture model. This keeps managers' skills fresh with regards to using the just culture model, and the real scenarios help reinforce knowledge.

The team also leads discussions on WellSpan's online

patient safety discussion boards around the just culture model on questions like “How can we proactively identify a risk before at-risk behaviors lead to adverse outcomes for patients?” Finally, WellSpan established an internal champion’s team where each member was assigned a certain number of managers to mentor. This helps user adoption and make sure one person isn’t too overwhelmed with training requests.

Now, Risk with the additional of just culture documentation is used not only for clinical events but also used by the financial services department, human resources, pastoral services and others.

The Result: Increased just culture documentation in Risk identifies system flaws

Just culture documentation via Risk supports mid-level management in identifying systems, processes and working conditions that contributed to errors as described by the IOM. System failure documentation in Risk assists in documenting the existence of a system problem, identifying risks, understanding the extent of problems, alerting other stakeholders to system failures and determining an appropriate course of action. For example, just culture documentation through Risk proved critical in identifying a major medication system flaw that appeared routine at first. Through the data collected, WellSpan was able to significantly minimize the potential reoccurrence of a similar process-related event.

The patient safety team monitored adoption of the just culture model by examining incident reports that had just culture documentation. Since manager training, almost 30% of reports have documentation attached (up from just 6.5% prior to training). However, a higher quantity of reports is not necessarily indicative of a higher quality of reports. The team also reviewed the incident reports to ensure that the follow-up action selected is appropriate given the type of error (e.g., for an incident caused by human error, the manager should console the employee). If they don’t match, a team member would call the person who filled out the incident report to deliver just-in-time training.

Reporting system failures through Risk provides a summary overview of particular systems or processes in need of additional scrutiny. Documenting just culture interventions over time helps to show trends and demonstrate historical successes over time, such as catching a pattern of minor system failures before it escalates to a major failure. This is extremely helpful in prioritizing quality improvement efforts.

Finally, managers review a monthly summary report of

“I’m far from an IT guy and I literally modified the Risk form for just culture documentation in a couple of hours.”

Gary Merica, Patient Safety Officer
WellSpan Health

medication errors that include just culture documentation. This report is built using Risk’s Report Producer and helps the team look for patterns to identify potential system failures, correlations and trends. Once these events are identified, specific departments use that information in their monthly staff meetings to review and identify outstanding systems issues that have not been remediated. They also discuss the depth and breadth of the issues and plan quality improvement projects accordingly.

Next steps

Merica acknowledges that training its managers first, followed by physicians, was the right choice for WellSpan to engage physicians in just culture. Since the feedback was so positive from managers, it was easy to get buy-in from all of the medical staff. For example, one staff member commented that she “...appreciate[s] knowing that management is adopting a patient and outcome improvement system, rather than a punitive error reporting system.”

However, Merica acknowledges that creating a just culture is something that needs nurturing: “This isn’t something where you can just flip a switch and create a just culture where there wasn’t one before. We work closely with staff so that we’re crystal clear when we’re working in a mentoring or coaching mentality, or when we’re disciplining.”

Tracking incidents along with just culture documentation has helped WellSpan’s various healthcare disciplines buy in to reporting and analyzing the medication errors in Risk. Says Merica, “We need to demonstrate to our staff that when they do report, things will happen—moreover, the right things will happen.” The addition of just culture documentation demonstrates that these reports are intended to improve systems and behavior and improve safety—not punish people for human error or badly designed systems.

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