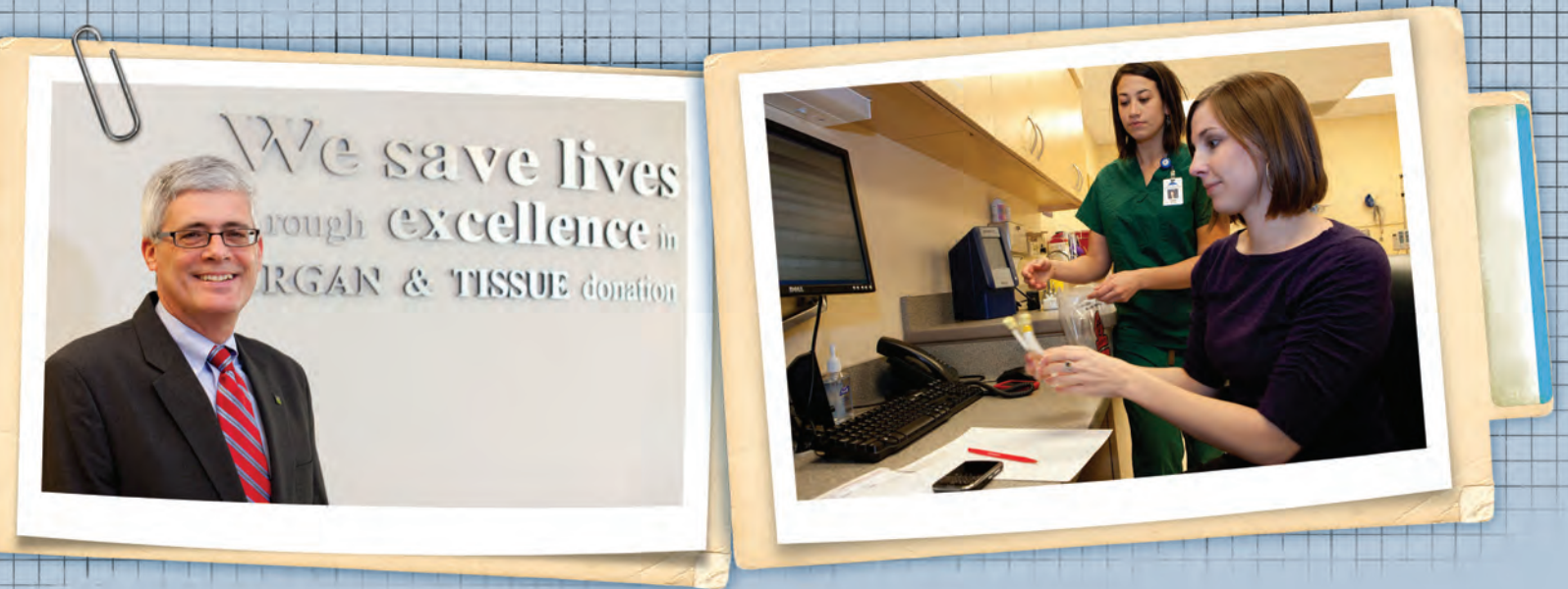


Aligning for Excellence

Using Baldrige model can help OPOs focus on what's most important



In 10 OPOs across the country, executives are taking a first look at data from physician satisfaction surveys recently completed in their regions. The effort, initiated by Mid-America Transplant Services (MTS) in St. Louis, will enable OPOs to better understand how to identify the key factors that define a poor or great physician-partner relationship.

"We've been surveying our own hospital and physician partners since 1998," said Dean F. Kappel, MTS' president/CEO. "But we need comparative data from other OPOs to define the quality benchmarks that make *any* OPO great in terms of quality and service." Kappel has served in many OPTN/UNOS roles over the years, including as the OPO representative on the board's executive committee.

For the past decade, MTS has focused on developing a "blueprint for excellence," a roadmap that is enabling the OPO to continuously enhance services, satisfaction and results.

Utilizing the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award criteria, the introspective journey has been both challenging and rewarding, forcing the organization to take a hard look at how it defines its primary customer, aligns its entire business model around that customer, and then tracks and analyzes data to benchmark and make quality improvements.

"In talking with employees, our external customers and partners, we can't assume we know what's best. We have to listen as they define their own needs," Kappel explained, "and then find ways to satisfy those needs.

"The process forces us to focus on why and how we do our jobs to support our mission of saving lives through excellence in organ and tissue donation," he added.

Dean F. Kappel, president/CEO, Mid-America Transplant Services, beside the organization's mission statement, which was crafted by employees in the early stages of MTS' quality journey.

Emily McDowell (seated), donor evaluation coordinator at MTS, serves as an onsite "first responder" to evaluate potential organ donor cases before organ procurement coordinators, such as Gina Ferrante, RN (standing), are dispatched to local hospitals. The two-stage process cuts procurement coordinator hours per case significantly and results in higher job retention in that critical position.

DEFINING THE PRIMARY CUSTOMER

One of the hardest conversations internally, he said, was defining the primary customer.

"Everyone had a different answer, which made it difficult to create a focused business model to drive excellence," Kappel said. "Some said the customer was the hospital where donations occurred. Others said referring physicians, funeral directors or transplant centers.

"It took us months to identify the donor family as our primary customer. Without them, we couldn't do anything we needed to do to save lives."

As the organization aligned its people, resources and services around the donor family, all employees—not just those on the front lines—realized how they fit into the mission of saving lives and caring for donor families. For example, he said, the financial staff ensures—by proactively reviewing all bills—that a donor family doesn't get charged inappropriately.

Defining the overall metrics that drive excellence is a key to ongoing quality improvements.

Policy Proposal Published for Public Comment

Responses due by March 18

Kappel believes OPOs must think beyond traditional outcomes data such as consent, conversion and yield, and identify the actual *processes* that drive those results. Once common definitions are determined, he said, OPOs can benchmark against top-performing organizations and identify, replicate and sustain best practices.

An example of going a step further is the recently released data on organ conversion and yield from the Scientific Registry of Transplant Recipients (SRTR), which provides outcomes data adjusted for case mix.

“All employees — not just those on the front lines — realized how they fit into the mission of saving lives...”

POSITIVE RESULTS FOR STAFF

Does the journey to excellence make a difference? In the years that MTS has utilized the Baldrige business model, it has increased organ donation by more than 50 percent and has sustained those results. It also has a more than 90 percent employee retention rate, including in the difficult area of organ procurement coordinators.

“Retention rates for organ procurement nurses were below 50 percent for several years primarily because of the long hours they logged while waiting for and then handling organ donations,” said Diane Brockmeier, MTS executive vice president/chief operating officer.

“After we surveyed our nurses, we created a new donor evaluation coordinator position in early 2009. The donor evaluation coordinators function as first responders and go onsite to evaluate the situation and talk with hospital staff.

“That shaves as much as eight to 14 hours off of the total time an organ procurement nurse is on site for a particular case. Our nurse retention rate is now at 92 percent,” Brockmeier added.

For its internal and external quality efforts, MTS is a two-time recipient of the Missouri Quality Award, most recently in 2010 (see write-up in *Across the Country*, p. 14).

MTS also has been recognized by national organizations as among the best places to work, with high job and benefits satisfaction and innovative internal management programs. Last year, MTS earned the honor of being the only nonprofit that was paid a site visit by the Malcolm Baldrige committee.

This year, president/CEO Kappel will chair a federal task force aimed at fostering quality improvements and excellence among all OPOs.

“By advocating for OPOs to collaboratively develop new data benchmarks,” he said, “we can identify the processes that truly work. We’ve done it before with HRSA’s Organ Donation Collaboratives.

“Now,” he added, “it’s time to reach even higher.”

The following policy proposal was released for expedited public comment on January 21. The comment period is open through March 18.

After all comments have been received, the sponsoring committees will evaluate the suggestions, consider modifications and submit the final proposal to the OPTN/UNOS board of directors. The board will consider the proposal and may vote on it at its subsequent board meeting, scheduled for June 28 and 29 in Richmond, Va.


Comments may be submitted via the mail and online (see website address below). If you have a question on a proposal, call your regional administrator at (804) 782-4800.


Proposed model for assessing the effectiveness of individual OPOs in key measures of organ recovery and utilization

[organ procurement organization (OPO) and membership and professional standards committees (MPSC)]

The proposed policy change affects OPTN and UNOS bylaws, Appendix B, Section I: Organ Procurement Organizations.

The policy proposes the use of a statistical model to analyze OPO performance. This model utilizes a comparison of observed (actual) to expected organs transplanted per donor (yield) based upon donor-specific characteristics in each Donation Service Area. The model will be used in aggregate (for all organs) in addition to organ-specific performance measures and predicts how many organs would have been recovered and transplanted if the OPO performed at the level of the national average for donors with similar characteristics.

The MPSC will use the model to monitor OPO performance, similar to existing practices for monitoring transplant program performance. Through this approach, the MPSC will identify opportunities for improvement at OPOs whose observed organ yield falls below expected levels by more than a threshold. The bylaw proposal provides information regarding the model’s intended use by the MSPC as well as the threshold that will result in MPSC inquiry. 

 To submit your comments on the policy proposal above, visit the OPTN website at [http://optn.transplant.hrsa.gov/policy-management > public comment](http://optn.transplant.hrsa.gov/policy-management>public-comment), fax to (804) 782-4896, or mail to Public Comment Coordinator, Department of Policy, UNOS, P.O. Box 2484, Richmond, VA 23218-2484.

To submit general feedback and to sign up to receive e-mail notification of public comment opportunities, send an e-mail to publiccomment@unos.org.