Want to get started on lean thinking?

There’s a method you can apply called 5S.

5S is about cleaning up and organizing work areas. The idea is to create a “visual workplace” that is uncluttered, helping to put an end to the searching, delays, and stress caused when you can’t find what you need quickly. 5S helps make work areas safer and more productive.

At Swedish Hospital in Seattle, which has practiced lean thinking for years, Carla Brannen, RN, BSN, CNOR, manager of general multispecialty inpatient surgery, and her team have “5S’d” a variety of projects, such as case cart staging and equipment storage.

Before 5S, the OR did not have an area for staging case carts. The carts are assembled in sterile processing, 3 floors below, and completed in the ORs’ sterile cores. The team used 5S to come up with a plan for staging the carts and creating space for them in the cores.

“We had places where we stored old supplies and equipment we had not used in a long time,” Brannen says. “We looked at everything in those areas. As we cleaned and sorted out, we put equipment we do use in specific places, with markings on the floor or a sign on the wall.” That freed space for the case carts.

Under the new staging plan, the staff knows specifically where to pick up the carts and drop them off. When they deliver a cart, they mark it off on the white board that lists the day’s surgical schedule.

Planning is key

How is 5S different than a to-do list? Some key concepts:

- **Advanced planning.** A complex 5S project might need 6 weeks of planning, while a simpler one may need less. “This planning is especially important if you are going to involve other departments,” Brannen says. You may need help from Environmental Services for cleaning and buy-in from surgeons to get rid of old equipment.

- **Authorizing manager.** You identify an authorizing manager, as well as leaders from other departments, for support and resources.

- **Goals and targets.** You determine where you are and where you need to go.

- **3 Actuals Walk.** You go to the actual place, talk to the actual people, and observe the actual process. This gives you a better idea what needs to be improved.

- **Preworkshop audit.** You gather baseline data and set up metrics to measure the results.

- **Communication.** 5S uses what it calls a “newspaper” for reporting at 30, 60, and 90 days after the project. The newspaper is really a planning grid that lays out each action, who is accountable, who supports it, when it will be completed, and when it will be checked.

In planning 5S projects, Brannen uses a blueprint that maps out planning steps week by week.
Brannen learned 5S as part of Swedish's lean training. Managers who want to learn on their own can read a book such as 5S for Operators. Once Brannen learned 5S, she led a short training session for the staff.

“The more the staff uses 5S, the more they learn the process,” she says. “They'll start thinking where else they can use it.”

The 5S blueprint is in the OR Manager Toolbox at www.ormanager.com.

Resource