

Success of RI ICU Collaboration means enhanced health care for patients

‘The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.”

United by the Rhode Island ICU Collaborative, more than a thousand health care professionals from across the state have proven this adage to be true. For more than two years, they have participated in a statewide effort aimed at improving the care of adult intensive care unit (ICU) patients. Hospitals have implemented proven strategies, developed by nationally renowned organizations, that focus on collaboration, open dialogue, teamwork and persistence. The work of these health care professionals has been extraordinary. ICU teams have improved the quality and safety of care for patients by reducing the number of days spent in the ICU, complications and associated costs. These successes have enhanced care for the more than 16,000 patients treated in Rhode Island’s intensive care units each year.

Health care is based in science, a subject that is forever evolving. New innovations and practices are being discovered each day. The key to the Collaborative has been learning from each other while focusing on what has the most impact on patient care and having frank discussions about how care can be improved.

For instance, every hospital in Rhode Island has adopted a universal standard of using a special antiseptic to cleanse the site before the insertion of a catheter. The significant impact this practice has had on patient care was unknown just a few short years ago.

Likewise, after learning that elevating the head of the bed of ventilator patients will decrease the chance of pneumonia, hospitals have implemented a universal policy of lifting those patients’ beds to 30 degrees. Some hospitals have gone to the next step and painted a line on the wall so physicians, staff and visitors can quickly determine if the bed is at the appropriate height.

The outcomes of implementing these evidence-based techniques have been astounding. Results in 2007 include decreasing the rate of catheter-related blood stream infections by 42% and a 16% drop in ventilator-associated pneumonia. In addition, staff surveys have found that employees are more confident in the care being delivered and feel empowered to continue improvement.

These successes have positively impacted the care provided to patients in all 263 ICU beds in our state. A conservative estimate of the Rhode Island ICU Collaborative’s impact during 2007 showed \$2.8 million in costs avoided, 19 lives saved, and a reduction of 958 ICU patient days.

The Collaborative has received statewide support. Rep. Patrick Kennedy, who has long supported health care improvement, was instrumental in launching the Collaborative.

The ICU staffs have been supported in their efforts by their hospitals, the Rhode Island Quality Institute, the Hospital Association of Rhode Island and Quality Partners of Rhode Island. Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island and UnitedHealthcare of New England have provided \$1.7 million since 2005 to fund the project’s management costs through 2009. Hospitals have committed immeasurable resources to support the internal costs of the program.

The Rhode Island ICU Collaborative has provided hospitals with tools and resources to build upon existing quality improvement and patient safety efforts. The work of the ICU teams has had a profound positive effect on our health care system, and puts Rhode Island well on its way to becoming the safest state in the nation in ICU care.

These health care professionals deserve congratulations for their continued dedication to improving health care in Rhode Island. They have proven what can be accomplished through true collaboration.

**Laura Adams President & CEO Rhode Island Quality Institute Margaret Cornell, RN, MS Project Coordinator
Quality Partners of Rhode Island Jean Marie Rocha, RN, MPH Vice President, Clinical Affairs Hospital
Association of Rhode Island**