

ST. BARNABAS HOSPITAL
Improvements in the Care Transitions Department

The Labor Management Project was asked to address concerns within the Care Transitions Department at St. Barnabas Hospital.

The Challenge: Relationships within the Care Transitions department were strained. Miscommunication was frequent and there was a general sense of frustration. Social workers felt as if they did not have adequate guidance from management, equipment (e.g. computers), or work space. Social workers also felt that they were getting mixed messages about their discharge work – they must provide excellent discharge planning and support for patients while at the same time making sure that the patients are moving out as soon as possible. Managers felt that the social workers were fighting against the case management system at the same time that they were supposed to be implementing it.

The Solution: Consultants from the Labor Management Project (LMP) sought to improve inter- and intra-departmental communications and morale among the staff by helping the hospital establish a Care Transitions Labor Management Steering Committee. The committee provided an opportunity for representatives of management and the front line staff – including nurses and social workers - to address communication, staffing, social work supervision, teamwork, HCAHPS scores and understanding HCAHPS, and availability of computer equipment. The team also investigated training programs that would provide RNs and Social Workers with the specific skills to successfully perform discharge planning. The “Healthcare Team Vitality Instrument” was administered in the fall of 2011 and the summer of 2012 to measure the Care Transition staff perceptions of their department’s progress. This survey emphasized front line staff empowerment and engagement, communication, patient care, and team collaboration.

The Results: Improvements were made in most of the problem areas addressed by the Committee. For instance, availability of space for the social workers improved, computer software and equipment were updated and staffing was increased on both the nursing and social work sides. The survey showed slight progress on most issues, with the movement of the survey responses small but moving consistently in a positive direction.

