

# Operational Excellence in Healthcare

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## Abstract

Since 2000, I have been highly involved in improving processes in healthcare. It is observed that a number of incidents that occurred in the last couple of years indicate that patient safety in hospitals is not satisfactory. Also, increasing costs, quality problems and long admission times are regular news items. Some people are of the opinion that hospitals are not in control of their operations and that they can learn a lot from car manufacturers, such as Toyota. Others think that hospitals cannot and should not be compared to a car factory. And then there are the numerous methods for improving the operation, that have been offered to hospitals by consultancy agencies, such as Lean Six Sigma and the Theory of Constraints. In this talk, we explain our views of improving operational effectiveness in healthcare. The central mission of a healthcare organization is to deliver good healthcare to patients within financial restrictions posed by society. Good healthcare partly consists of effective methods for diagnosis and treatment. The required knowledge to design and apply these methods comes from medical science. We believe that medicine, including medical statistics, is a rather mature science. But in addition, these diagnostic and treatment methods have to be delivered to patients and this is done by various processes: medical processes, medical support processes, and non-medical support processes. As medical science acquires knowledge about diagnostics and treatment, the science of operations management acquires the knowledge to design, control and improve processes. Operational effectiveness qualifies how well processes in an organization perform, and operational excellence expresses the ambition of organizations to do this extremely well. We believe that it is in healthcare operations management, rather than in medical science, that the fields of quality and industrial statistics can make a valuable contribution. I have supported the implementation of Lean Six Sigma in several hospitals and I have seen tremendous improvements. More than 600 documented projects show that effective healthcare processes lead to more reliable, faster, flexible and cost-efficient healthcare. We have published these findings in leading international journals on subjects like: improvement of the patient's clinical path; efficiency improvement of resources; measuring healthcare quality; increasing the efficiency of nursing departments; and classification of healthcare improvement projects. In this talk I discuss these issues.