



MANITOBA INSTITUTE
FOR PATIENT SAFETY

Make It Personal: Interview Series

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An Interview with Tamara Coombs

As I walked into the Victoria General Hospital to conduct this month's MIPS interview, I was quickly greeted by a volunteer who helped me find my meeting location. In the lobby there are MIPS *It's Safe to Ask* brochures in at least five languages prominently displayed. As I wait for my appointment, I am asked no less than three times if I have been helped.



A Welcoming Environment

Upon meeting Tamara Coombs, it is clear that this welcoming environment is a direct reflection of Tamara's work as the Quality Manager of the hospital. She is dynamic, warm, and tenacious, and her definition of patient safety mirrors my experience in the hospital lobby. "Patient safety", says Tamara, "is an environment where patients and family feel, from the minute that they arrive, that they are going to get good care, that they are being listened to, and that there is no dumb question. It is also about staff feeling the same way, and being empowered to bring up any concern to anyone in the organization."

No One Sits on the Bench – Including All the Players

Tamara says she is a "one-person department", but it is clear that her work has a wide reach. She has increased the attention and awareness of patient safety by involving and connecting all of the hospital departments. The most impactful initiative has been the implementation of a site-wide daily safety huddle. The safety huddle lasts 15 minutes and has all areas of the hospital represented – housekeeping, security, labs, environmental services, materials handling, management, dietary and all inpatient units.

Tamara says of the site-wide safety huddle, "I think it's driven our safety culture in such a positive way. It's creating safety for staff to report things." There have been incidences that have shown that by having all players of the hospital at these huddles, messages of patient safety are trickling down to front line staff and making them aware of the role they can take in patient safety. "For example, a housekeeper knocked on my door one day and said she thought she saw



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a patient get into a cab. She had taken down the cab company name and the cab number. Her actions allowed us to find a missing patient. Even though this person doesn't attend safety huddles, her manager does, and so the ripple effect is evident." Since the implementation of the daily site-wide safety huddle, occurrence reporting has gone up 100%. This provides evidence that this approach is working by allowing staff to feel more comfortable with reporting occurrences. "This is important, because if we don't know about incidences that are occurring, we can't address them."

A Proactive Patient Safety Approach

Now that staff is feeling more comfortable with reporting safety incidents, the goal is now focused on taking a proactive approach to prevent occurrences. For example, at daily inpatient unit huddles, staff are being encouraged to consider the question, "Who is at risk for a fall today and what are we going to do to stop it?" The site-wide daily huddle also is working to consider potential future safety issues, as well as review any incidents over the past 24 hours.

They are also working to anticipate patient needs, and use best practices to help patients understand information. "We need to make patients a partner without putting the onus on them. We need to recognize that patients might not realize they don't actually understand, or that they might not know what questions to ask. We can be proactive in these cases, by doing things like using the teach-back approach. This is where the patient is asked to share how much they understand, so that the staff has insight into any knowledge gaps of the patient."

For patients to be proactive, Tamara recommends keeping your own record of your health care information and bringing it with you to any health care encounters. This ensures there is never an issue of there being missing information for the care team, especially if you are seeing providers in different places. "It can help you get better care. And the process of putting that information together might help you formulate some questions that you want to ask." It is evident that the message of *It's Safe to Ask* is one Tamara works diligently to communicate.

The Manitoba Institute for Patient Safety (MIPS) is an independent, not-for-profit corporation established in 2004 to promote and coordinate activities that improve patient safety and enhance quality healthcare in Manitoba.

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