

**LEA Healthcare E-letter - 7 August 2006**  
**Next Steps in Lean Healthcare**  
**Daniel T Jones**

Dear Lean Community Member

Interest in how lean thinking can help healthcare is growing. Many hospitals are now beginning their own lean activities and the *Lean Thinking in the NHS* pamphlet we wrote for the NHS Confederation has attracted a lot of attention. Now is the time to build on these foundations and to discuss the next steps.

We plan to do this at the third Lean Healthcare Forum on 2 October at the National Motorcycle Museum in Birmingham. We intend to organise this around three main strands of work - sharing experiences of creating lean hospitals – redesigning patient flows from primary to secondary care – and an expert session on pushing forward our knowledge of lean in healthcare.

Many hospitals have progressed down their lean journeys in different ways. If you are just beginning or are struggling to make progress there is great value in learning from the experiences of others. How did they start, what did they do first and how did they spread lean beyond pockets of improvement to the core flows through the hospital? We will hear from several hospitals who have not told their stories before. We will also focus on documenting the results from lean and the appropriate metrics to drive lean improvements. At the end of the day Michael Ballé, the author of the first lean novel *The Gold Mine*, will remind us of the importance Toyota places on the improving the details of every activity as well as redesigning the flows through healthcare.

The challenge in applying lean in primary care (and mental health and other community services) is to distinguish between general efforts to eliminate waste and specifically using lean to redesign patient flows, not just through primary care but also into secondary care. My hunch is that we have not yet pulled all the lean insights together to be able to see the true potential of lean in this area. These include: - understanding the true pattern of demand (through open access) and the demand for different types of diagnosis and treatment (such as one-off versus multiple interactions), mapping the whole patient journey and all the actions of primary and secondary care providers for each of these paths, and beginning with the more routine cases in each stream to redesign where and how these flows are organised to dramatically cut the time and effort involved. This will free up more time to be spent on the difficult cases and to treat more patients. It will also provide a framework for analysing alternative ways of delivering different kinds of care.

If we can combine the knowledge of those who have studied primary care (and mental health) with a lean analysis of several examples of typical patient flows (homework every participant can bring with them) we should be able to launch some action learning experiments in lean primary and community care.

Lean is of course a never ending experiential journey. The more we learn from experiments the more questions it throws up. This is why it is important that the experienced lean folk brainstorm new thoughts together. Topics on my list include the following. How do we help everyone see the bigger picture beyond single patient flows by mapping the hospital or even the regional healthcare system as a collection of processes? Beyond the initial separation of the routine from the different patients in order to create a flow out of a series of separate actions how do we deal with the remaining complexity and variable cycle times and incorporate them into the flow? How should we document and track the results from lean in healthcare? How do we overcome the confusion that exists around the issue of standardisation, which Toyota places so much emphasis on? We plan to address these and other issues that participants may want to share amongst a group who have already gone well beyond the initial steps with lean.

We will post the final agenda for the third Lean Healthcare Forum on the web site [www.leanhealthcare.org.uk](http://www.leanhealthcare.org.uk) by the end of this month. If you have any suggestions or would like to raise another issue let me know. I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible on Monday 2 October.

Yours sincerely

Daniel T Jones

Chairman, Lean Enterprise Academy and the Lean Healthcare Network

PS. After the Forum we are offering two one day workshops on *Creating Flow in Healthcare and Mapping Healthcare Processes* in Tewksbury, Gloucestershire, on 3 and 4 October. In addition we are offering the opportunity to actually participate hands-on, on one of our **five day in-house healthcare workshops in October**. Check the web site [www.leanuk.org](http://www.leanuk.org) for details or contact Lizzie Lewis at LEA at [lizzie@leanuk.org](mailto:lizzie@leanuk.org) . Bolton Hospital also offers several ways to see what they are doing with lean - for information please contact the Bolton Lean Team [lean.team@rbh.nhs.uk](mailto:lean.team@rbh.nhs.uk)