

Success Stories: Certification Helps Pikeville Medical Center Strengthen Patient Safety and Quality

The great philosopher Confucius once said, “To know what you know and what you do not know, that is true knowledge.”

In the health care profession this observation is particularly relevant. With so many moving parts, personnel, and patients to tend to, it’s easy for organizations and individuals to fall behind on the latest advances, strategies, and standards. However, committing to continuous learning can make a real difference in the quality of care and patient safety. This choice to improve professionally and personally is something Pikeville Medical Center (PMC), Pikeville, Kentucky, believes in.

Staff in the Standards and Interpretations Department at PMC recently demonstrated their commitment to the highest levels of patient safety by becoming some of the very first applicants to pass the Certified Joint Commission Professional[™] (CJCP[®]) exam. CJCP is a professional certification that represents accreditation knowledge and achievement in patient-related safety and quality issues. Launched in 2013 by Joint Commission Resources, the program not only provides professional recognition, it signals a recipient’s up-to-date expertise in maintaining and leading compliance in an organization. “Folks that pass this exam really have proven their knowledge of our standards and survey preparation, and ultimately patient safety,” says Susan Murray, associate director of the CJCP program, Joint Commission Resources.

Achieving that expertise is just what PMC Vice President Cheryl Hickman had in mind when she decided to pursue the CJCP certification. She learned about the new program at a September 2012 Hospital Executive Briefing in New York and called PMC’s Joint Commission Specialist Sheila Belcher, RN, CJCP, to let her know she was ordering the CJCP educational modules. “I have always believed in certifications throughout my career, to enhance one’s practice,” adds Hickman. “I felt that taking the CJCP exam would confirm our commitment to meeting standards, and to increase patient quality and safety.”

Belcher was immediately interested in being certified after she read through the CJCP materials. She recognized how the program could help strengthen her department and the hospital. “I think certification really helps you



Sheila Belcher, RN, CJCP, Pikeville Medical Center, Pikeville, KY. Photo courtesy of Pikeville Medical Center

understand more about what it is you’re doing,” Belcher says.

The modules were ordered in the fall. Belcher and Hickman passed the very first exam offered by JCR and received their CJCP certifications in January 2013. Breanna Suttles, [Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services] CMS Specialist, was also certified in 2014. “We have three specialists who work in this office, so one more person needs to pass the exam to have our whole department certified,” Belcher says.

They expect to achieve 100% certification in 2015.

According to Belcher, the CJCP certification has been a tremendous help to the department, particularly when it comes to Joint Commission compliance. Accredited hospitals like PMC must be surveyed every three years. It’s an inspection that The Joint Commission conducts to ensure that organizations are in compliance with the standards. A team of three or four surveyors typically conducts a survey, including one Life Safety Specialist.

Belcher says that in the time between the 2011 and 2014 surveys, PMC experienced a tremendous amount of growth, increasing its staff by more than 600 employees, picking up physician practices, and opening a new clinic building in the spring of 2014. “In 2011 when our survey was over

with we knew, as big as we were growing, that if we did not continually stay survey ready that it would be much, much more difficult to pass the next one,” Belcher says.

The information learned in the CJCP modules, along with additional resources from the Joint Commission such as the Leading Practice Library (http://www.jointcommission.org/leading_practice_library/), helped Belcher and her colleagues look at standards and best practices in a different way. She says that the CJCP online discussion forum, put together by Murray, was a particularly great resource for networking with other Joint Commission and accreditation professionals. It gave her department a place to talk about what the hospital might be struggling with and what solutions might be available as they prepared for the 2014 survey. “Sometimes you can look at something and think you understand a standard or the element of performance, but somebody else might look at it and offer an entirely different and fresh perspective,” Belcher says.

In order to stay survey ready, PMC created a monthly task force and published standards in its physician newsletter every month. They also met with chapter groups and tried to educate every single department in the hospital as often as possible. Specifically, the task force created a structured orientation for physicians that included discussions on hot button issues. The National Patient Safety Goals were inserted into their new hire and annual education materials, and a greater effort was made to prepare new employees for survey. “We probably did more preparation with all of the staff than we had ever done,” Belcher says.

A four-day on-site accreditation survey at PMC took place in August 2014. Belcher says the hospital staff could not have had a better experience with the surveyors. “They were a very good group to work with. They were very informative and instructional, and more than happy to talk about best practices and share things with us.”

Hickman said that her overall experience, from being certified to participating in the 2014 survey, was very rewarding. She said the exam not only enhanced the staff’s ability to review and interpret Joint Commission standards, but other standards for certifications as well. “This certification has given all of us a focus on quality and safety, which has benefited our staff and patients,” she says. “Our hospital did a great job during our Joint Commission survey, and they enjoyed it, as our expertise helped them to be very prepared for it.”

Belcher, who worked in nursing for 27 years before moving into her current role, says The Joint Commission is often referred to as nursing’s report card. In order to get an “A” on the survey it’s important for staff to continually take on the challenge of expanding their knowledge base. “I would definitely encourage anyone who is in this role at

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their facility, organization, or health system to go through the CJCP process. It is a great learning experience,” she says. “Any time you increase your own personal knowledge, it just helps you grow as an individual.”

Belcher admits the CJCP exam is intensive and says anyone looking to take it must be prepared. Joint Commission Resources recommends candidates be familiar with the *Comprehensive Accreditation Manual for Hospitals (CAMH)* and that they not only know the standards but understand the intent behind them. Other helpful resources include the standards FAQs on the Joint Commission website, reading *Perspectives* and *The Source*, as well as considering the nine JCR education modules that are available. There is also a one-day preparation course. “Those educational materials are very helpful, particularly the modules, because they allow you to study at your own pace,” Belcher recommends. “I felt like I learned a lot through the course of my study.”

Belcher adds that the exam is also very experience-driven and she understands why there are eligibility requirements for the test. “If you have never been involved in a survey yourself, I think the exam will be much more difficult. It’s not enough to sit down and read the “Accreditation Process” chapter in the manual,” she states. “Knowing how surveyors interact, how they ask you things, the expectations as the survey goes along, the outcomes of your survey . . . that experience was invaluable to me going into the exam.”

This year, hundreds of professionals are preparing to take the CJCP examination in the United States, and JCR is currently discussing an international version of the test. The growing popularity suggests that more health care professionals are realizing the value that certification brings to their profession and practices. Hickman is not surprised. “The Joint Commission has high standards for patient safety, and taking the exam shows a personal commitment to staff, and to the quality and safety for our patients.”

Belcher adds that CJCP certification truly validates a person’s knowledge and experience. “I think taking the time to get certified says a little bit about who you are, and about your desire to be the best you can be.” 