



Shawna Forst, CPHQ

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When Shawna Forst began her education career in 2002, she had no idea that she would become a leader in healthcare and performance and process improvement (PPI). After initially facing a tough job market and state budget cuts in education, she took a job as a cardiac technician at Pella Regional Health Center, an independent, 25-bed, critical-access hospital in Pella, IA, that runs six outreach clinics and an onsite clinic for a large equipment manufacturer.

The one-time educator with a passion for teamwork, coaching, and school athletics acknowledges that healthcare leadership is a great fit for her. Never one to shy away from new experiences, Forst says that her role as a healthcare quality professional (HQP) has evolved over the years as she has learned and taught Lean methodology, chaired a hospital quality committee, and gotten involved in The Joint Commission accreditation.

Forst now serves as advisor in quality, safety, and risk management at Pella Regional Health Center.

Coleading the PPI Work Group

As a project leader, she expects the best from everyone, particularly herself. She served as a coleader of the Performance and Process Improvement (PPI) Competency Work Group.

"I thought this would be a good challenge for me and something I could do to stretch myself," she says. A social person who prefers face-to-face interaction, Forst prepared for the work group's teleconference meetings by looking up team members' photos on LinkedIn. She was especially excited to colead with Nidia Williams, PhD MBB CPHQ. "I just wanted to take in the experience and soak it all up," she says.

The Importance of CPHQ

"The CPHQ has allowed me to extend my knowledge far beyond what I ever thought it could be," Forst explains. "The CPHQ

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shows my commitment to continuously improving myself. Every patient wants to go to a board-certified physician or a certified nurse, right? I want to be that certified quality expert, and the CPHQ lends credibility.”

What Motivates Her

A self-described “yes” person and perfectionist, Forst says she is always willing to do what is asked of her. As a result, “I have this humongous hat rack with all these different hats that I wear in my current career,” says the career multitasker. Even as a child, she was an outgoing leader who enjoyed getting things done. Today, as a project leader, she is a stickler for detail and is willing to ask those paradigm-stretching, large-scope questions to ensure that objectives are met and even surpassed.

What She Likes Most About Her Profession

“I have a soft spot in my heart for every single department in my facility and enjoy working with people just as much during exciting times as uncertain and challenging times. I love understanding everybody’s role and helping others do so. There are just so many different personalities and so many great people here. I get to be social with everybody.”

How She Learned PPI Core Competencies

“I learn from being a part of projects, working with people, and learning what works and doesn’t work,” says Forst, who credits Lean

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as the foundation of her PPI skills. “I also think there are just some people who are innately wired to be PPI people. For perfectionists like me, nothing is ever good enough. You’re always looking toward that ideal. Once you celebrate something, you’ve got to get going on the next thing.”

The Relevance of PPI Core Competencies

“Being a well-rounded HQP doesn’t require expertise in all areas of quality. You can specialize in one area like PPI or use the PPI skills as one element of your quality toolkit. The PPI competencies provide professionals with a set of skills they can use to self-assess and identify areas for learning.” Forst recommends that HQPs interested in PPI talk to a trusted colleague or mentor, read books, and attend webinars and conferences.

Challenges

Forst says that her greatest challenge is “understanding people—who they are, what they do, how they are motivated and demotivated, their manners, and the reasons for their actions in adhering to behavior policies. Learning Lean and Six Sigma is the easy part; it’s all the other stuff—emotions, feelings, and perhaps longtime grudges—you have to navigate, and that’s the difficult part. Although it’s challenging to deal with people, it’s rewarding to work with teams, watch them come together, and get things done.”

Forst says that the other big challenge is dealing with massive amounts of data. “Our reimbursement is becoming tied to it. We don’t have the greatest or most flexible tools to take all that big data and whittle it down to something that is functional for physicians, nurses, or managers. They need it in bite-size pieces in order to use it in their busy worlds.”

Guiding Principles and Career Goals

“I always want to make things better. It’s important to evolve and continuously improve,” Forst says. “I’m a coordinator who doesn’t hesitate, for example, to help set up for meetings. We all have to be team players to get stuff done. I always want to do my best.”

As for her career goals, Forst has already coauthored a book on Lean healthcare, *Lean Healthcare in Action: A Practical Guide to Streamlining Processes*, and soon will serve as the president for the Iowa Association for Healthcare Quality. She also plans to get a master’s degree in either hospital administration or business administration.

“I think of healthcare as a higher calling. We do a lot of good work that we’re called to do. I’m passionate about process improvement, so I look outside of healthcare to vendors and businesses. We’re all interconnected in the economy and committed to the health of our employees and community. We are challenged to be the best.”

The Value of NAHQ

“When I was introduced to NAHQ by a friend, I really didn’t have any idea the value it held for healthcare professionals. I thought, ‘I want to be a part of this.’”

“Being a member of NAHQ allows me to be on top of issues. I am able to learn about quality and safety issues years prior to those issues actually falling on hospital leaders’ radar. It’s really nice to be ahead of the game and to be a go-to person in my facility for information, research, or an opinion.”

Message to NAHQ Colleagues

“If someone asks you to do a project, always say yes. Always learn and experience all you can. It’s not so much the tools you use; it’s the relationships that you build with the people across the table and across departmental lines that will help down the road. When you work with people who respect each other, it helps get through tough projects.”

Forst is concerned that her NAHQ colleagues aren’t using PPI to its full potential. “I still think we harm patients too much,” she says, choosing her words carefully. “PPI is heavily underutilized; there just isn’t enough accountability.” As a patient, “I don’t expect to have a fall, medication error, or bad customer service. PPI tools can actually make a direct impact on patient safety.”



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