National Nursing Home
QUALITY IMPROVEMENT CAMPAIGN

Testing Change, Starting Small
NNHQI Campaign Tip Sheet

I cannot say whether things will get better if we change; what I can say is they must change if they are to get better. -Georg C. Lichtenberg, physicist

Testing Change

The engine for your performance improvement project is a PDSA cycle. PDSA stands for Plan, Do, Study, Act – or as the IHI says "PDSA is shorthand for testing a change." Because a picture is so much more fun than a thousand words, check out this 6 minute Domestic Lean Goddess video. Complement the IHI's one-pager on how and why to do PDSA cycles with the QAPI's PDSA template to map YOUR tests of change.

Starting Small

Now, here's an important and sometimes overlooked strategy with your tests of change: Start small! This is like experimenting with a new recipe on your family before preparing it for guests.

(1) The change you are testing might or might not have the result you want; it might have a result you don't want. Starting small allows you to minimize any adverse impact.

(2) Finding the right change takes resources. Working on a smaller scale allows you to refine your change with fewer resources.

(3) Trialing a change requires effort. Starting small allows you to select a situation where you have the best chance of success. This could include engaging staff that resonate with the project and can champion the change. Or, it might entail working with a single neighborhood to help concentrate the effort and monitor the implementation more closely.

(4) It usually takes multiple cycles to get the 'recipe' right. Very often, it's not just one change that does the trick, but a combination of changes.

So what does 'small' mean? It could mean a small change, a small group of staff, a small group of residents, or a small area within your community. It can also be a combination of these.

Testing change requires data – another good reason to start small

Remember, you'll need to be collecting data to monitor the effect of the changes you make. It's important to start small with this too. With most of the Campaign goals, starting with a neighborhood, specific group of residents or stay type will help limit the data collection. This can be helpful while you create a workable process so the documentation becomes routine. For other goals, such as Safely Reducing Hospitalizations, you may want to start with your whole community. In these cases, start small by entering only the handful of required fields for the first month or two. In Tracking Tools where there are both required and optional fields, the required fields are always marked. Required fields are used in outcome calculations. Begin using the optional fields as desired to track patterns and processes associated with the outcomes.