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What if people lived healthier lives, had access to good quality care and took precautions against illness and disease? My days in the information technology department at United Health Group often made me think about the current healthcare scenario and the above questions. I doubted my future career choice as an IT programmer for a health insurance company. I needed a career that helped a large number of people and would continually challenge and motivate me to evolve. I quit my job and decided to pursue my area of interest, Health Administration and Policy at the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC).

MUSC's MHA program provided me with a basic but thorough understanding of the concepts of Project Management Processes through the Operations and Project Management course we took in the second semester. Perhaps even more important than my academic exposure is my experience outside the classroom. I participated in several projects from planning through close before joining this program and also during my school year which in different ways provided me the exposure and in-depth knowledge about Project Management. I have utilized several project management tools like Risk Assessment Matrix, Communication plan templates, Gantt Charts and Cause and effect diagram several times for our Group Community Project we did for our Project management course.

To further my interest in project management, I took up a summer internship in the Project Management Office (PMO), at the Medical University Hospital, Charleston, SC. During my internship, I had the opportunity to observe the manner in which IT projects are prioritized at MUSC by the executive leaders using a weighting system, based on defined clinical and operational criteria. I had to work extensively on the Project Management System at MUSC (Intuit – Quickbase). I also observed the composite nature of the organization and the project management approach used to manage projects within MUSC. I regularly attended the PMI Charleston chapter monthly meetings along with my coworkers during this internship.

After attending the chapter meetings, I joined PMI to become more knowledgeable about project management. Later in my internship, I took it one step further and attended a five day

Project Management Boot Camp here in Charleston SC. With the assistance of the training provided at the boot camp, I passed my CAPM exam on the August 11th 2011.

The motivation behind this desire to learn Project Management is to discover and incorporate best project management practices from other industries into health care. Healthcare is a heavily regulated industry with a large number of stakeholders. Like society itself, healthcare has been evolving rapidly in the United States over the last 50 years, in response to technological, economic, demographic, political and related influences. The imperative to care for more patients, to provide higher perceived quality care at less cost with increased reporting and tracking demands, in an environment of high potential liability and problematic reimbursement, is putting stress on health care managers.

I strongly believe that using a project management methodology would guide health care managers effectively through the project life cycle to achieve optimum results. In many health care settings, the ultimate impact of products and services may lead to *saving a life*. Patient care delivery is demanding in terms of time, sensitivities and risk. Communications become complex when multiple project stakeholders have varied interests. Resources (people, process, technology) are typically limited in this industry.

The benefits of using this methodology in health care include

- ❖ Efficient scope management will save time and cost by preventing scope creep.
- ❖ Enhanced project planning ensures agreement on major deliverables produced by the project.
- ❖ Explicit risk management plan to effectively manage risks.
- ❖ Improved communication among team members, stakeholders and project sponsor.
- ❖ Improved financial management meaning better estimates, more formal budgeting and better tracking of the project actual costs against the budget. All these result in better financial predictability and control.

- ❖ Effective change management will prevent unnecessary costs and ensures fewer disruptions to the project.
- ❖ A customized approach can be created, based on the organization's values and culture (Enterprise environmental factors) to compare projects and prioritize them.
- ❖ Numerous process improvement and quality improvement projects can be conducted by developing standard project management templates or prototypes suiting the individual organization needs.
- ❖ Will aid in understanding the various socio-political constraints imposed on the projects.
- ❖ Ensures timely completion of deliverables and project by implementing a schedule management plan that selects a scheduling methodology sets the format and establishes criteria for developing and controlling the project schedule.

One of the most daunting problems facing health care project managers is the management of stakeholders. Problems arising later in the project are mainly due to unsatisfied stakeholder expectations. By engaging the right people in the right way in the project, we can make a huge difference to its success.

The health care stakeholder group comprises of clinicians with embedded opinions about how processes should or should not work, administrators who are under constant scrutiny by insurance providers and government and professional agencies, equipment and materials producers (sellers) who are desperate to recover costs they have already spent to produce the products, the insurance companies struggling to determine, how to cover, who to cover and what to reimburse and the last but the most important group, the patients and their families, who are relentlessly worried for themselves and their loved ones and expect the best during one of the dismal times of their life.

I believe that implementing a proper project management methodology in health care would not only help us identify all the stakeholders but also to prioritize and evaluate the impact and influence they will have on that particular project. Engaging with stakeholders from the beginning enables a proactive cultivation of relationships that can serve as "assets" during challenging times.

Effective requirements gathering techniques such as Delphi, brainstorming and nominal group technique would eliminate any misinterpretation of stakeholder requirements. Understanding the stakeholders and their needs is vital to the success of any project. Once we have a clear idea of what the stakeholders are expecting from this project, then we can move forward and create a stakeholder management strategy.

Developing a robust stakeholder management strategy, for each individual group of stakeholders, would reduce discrepancies in communications. Each individual project team should scale their stakeholder management strategies relative to the risks and impacts their project is likely to create. There is no one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to stakeholder management. Documenting all this information and materials is essential as project managers can always refer to the Organizational Process Assets for historical information, while managing future projects.

Stakeholder management in the health care industry still lags way behind and is often haphazard. The stakeholders who voice their opinions vociferously always win. Therefore, it is necessary to engage each and every one of them equally from the beginning to the end. The role of the Project management methodology in health care would be to provide a framework that is logical, robust and consistent to govern an organization's projects. In this way any health care organization will have a structured approach to conducting its project activities.