Since making the decision to focus on length of stay for observation patients, we have reduced hours per patient by over 30%. This was achieved through the combination of process improvements and Hospital IQ’s platform.

Diane Murphy
Market Director Performance Excellence, Logistics & Virtual Care
MercyOne Des Moines

Reduce Length of Stay Through Proactive Management of Observation Patients

Hospital IQ’s Patient Flow solution provides MercyOne Des Moines with the ability to analyze, predict and manage the population of observation patients within multiple units across two hospitals. The hospital’s newly established governance team used the predictive capabilities of the Hospital IQ platform to:

- reduce average observation length of stay by 33% (more than 12 hours per stay)
- gain 100 bed days each month (equivalent of adding 3.6 beds of capacity)
- direct focus to observation patients to ensure appropriate status
- manage a rapidly shifting observation population in real time
- justify the formation of a dedicated observation unit with trained staff
MercyOne Des Moines’ Length of Stay Challenge

At MercyOne Des Moines, the average length of stay for observation patients ranged from 35 to 42 hours with more than 200 observation stays per month. The hospital regularly surpassed its target length of stay for those patients, which is 24 hours. At any given time, 10-15% of the adult population was in observation status, yet the hospital didn’t have a dedicated observation unit for these patients. Instead, patients were observed in different inpatient units and received care commensurate to inpatients. This required staff to redirect resources better suited for the more acute population.

In addition, MercyOne Des Moines did not have a robust multidisciplinary team to actively manage appropriate patient status. MercyOne Des Moines needed to improve the way it managed the length of stay for observation patients to ensure appropriate status.

Patient Flow Solution from Hospital IQ

To address the challenges associated with its rapidly shifting observation population, MercyOne Des Moines created a governance team and leveraged Hospital IQ’s AI-enabled operations management platform to support its governance, organizational and process changes.

Hospital IQ’s predictive and real-time tools were used to forecast upcoming observation patient demand, analyze the observation patient population in real time and provide the governance team on-demand access to key performance indicators, such as volume, location, length of stay and discharge processing time. Using this information, the governance team set goals to gain greater insight into:

- the observation portion of patient stays
- observation patients that should be appropriately converted to inpatients
- outpatient in-bed status to monitor irregularities as the new process rolled out

The real-time access to performance information helped MercyOne Des Moines’ governance team to accelerate initiatives that produced good results and adjust others that were not as effective. For example, the governance team directed one care manager and one utilization manager to round three times a day to evaluate observation patients for discharge eligibility or appropriate conversion to inpatient status. Based on early results, the team created a dedicated 38-bed observation care unit with nursing staff trained to evaluate observation criteria. Multidisciplinary care teams assigned to these patients used Hospital IQ to communicate and coordinate patient-related activities to achieve length of stay goals.

To date, MercyOne Des Moines has reduced the average observation length of stay by more than 12 hours per patient, freeing up more than 100 bed days per month. This is the equivalent to adding 3.6 beds’ worth of capacity. Today, the average length of stay is less than 24 hours. The observation team was expanded beyond the regular adult units of the hospital to cover patients in mother/baby and behavioral units to help reduce length of stay in these areas of the hospital as well.

About Hospital IQ

Hospital IQ is a team of industry veterans who are passionate about using their collective knowledge and experience to help hospital leaders transform operational practices, improve performance and deliver the best patient care to the most people.