

## POSTER ABSTRACTS

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PS2 – 24

### Doing More with Less: Optimizing Research Facilitation with Six Sigma Methodology

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**Background/Aim:** Research support groups face significant challenges. The volume of research is increasing; the need for clinician participation is rising; and, the economic state is forcing cost cutting measures. The Research Analytics and Biostatistics core of the Marshfield Clinic Research Foundation (MCRF) annually supports over 450 studies and data inquires. Faced with reports of staff fatigue and researcher dissatisfaction, MCRF began a formal redesign of our research facilitation processes.

**Methods:** The Six Sigma methodology was utilized. Data collection included surveys, focus groups, flow charting, root cause analysis, and SIPOC diagramming. Key aspects of the current process were measured in order to provide analyzable data. Based on this, project champions identified specific process improvement opportunities. A significant fraction of the redesign involved identifying and addressing cultural differences among the component services.

**Results:** The pre-existing processes contained multiple entry points with little formal prioritization. Staff frequently juggled multiple requests, resulting in loss of efficiency. The driving principles of the redesign included: 1) creating a single channel through which researchers could make requests; 2) enabling staff to complete one request/project before starting another; and 3) reducing the number of entry points to minimize staff interruptions. To accomplish this, job functions were re-defined. Each request is initially reviewed to identify resources required. A request tracking application was developed with the ability to assign resources to requests, define tasks and track effort expended by each resource. Request prioritization was also formalized.

**Conclusion:** The new process streamlined customer requests and more efficiently gathered request information. Staff efficiency is improved. Formal request tracking has improved accountability and workload planning. We have a better understanding of the resources needed for each request and have the ability to provide better resource projections. This increase in meaningful data gives us the ability to provide senior management with meaningful information about our work and to justify resources. It is occasionally argued that business process methodologies are too rigid to be adapted to the research culture. However, if research support is modeled as an instance of mass customization, these business-centric methods can be successfully applied.