

# Dominican a leader in preventing fatal errors

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## SANTA CRUZ

When Dominican Hospital set out to prevent patients on a breathing tube from contracting deadly pneumonia, most doctors thought it couldn't be done.

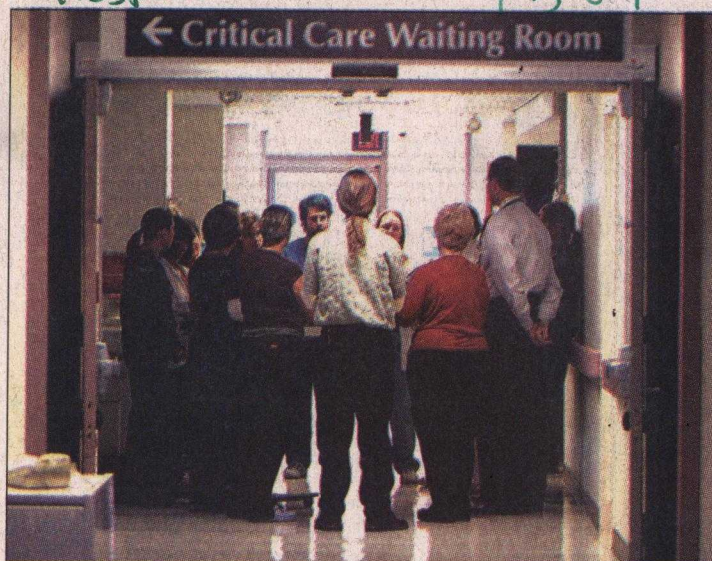
The results of the effort: not a single pneumonia case for more than two years.

No more than 20 other hospitals in the nation can make the same claim.

"Delivering the right care, 100 percent of the time — excellence, even perfection, is possible," said Joseph McCannon, vice president of the Institute of Healthcare Improvement, a nonprofit with worldwide influence.

Dr. Donald Berwick, the institute's founder, launched the 100,000 Lives Campaign in December 2004. The institute asked hospitals to adopt up to six major changes that, based on medical

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Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

More than a dozen members of the Dominican Hospital staff confer every morning to review the status of each patient in the intensive care unit.

## Hospital

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evidence, could save lives.

About 3,100 agreed, and two-thirds focused on preventing pneumonia by adopting measures recommended by the institute. They include raising the head of the patient's bed 30 degrees; frequently cleaning the patient's

### Dominican Hospital

Beds: 379

Employees: 1,700

mouth; lighter dosages of sedatives; and weaning the patient off a breathing tube as soon as possible.

The steps sound simple, but they work

— even though typically 15 percent of patients using a breathing tube develop pneumonia.

The last time a Dominican patient on a breathing tube had pneumonia was Oct. 12, 2004.

"People tell me, 'You ought to get this story out,'" said Dominican Vice President Lee Vanderpool. "It's really close to home for folks."

Dominican's success is touted by the institute as a model for others.

"It gave us confidence that others could perform at this level," said McCannon.

### Aiming for perfection

Every morning at 10 a.m., more than a dozen Dominican Hospital staff gather in the 16-bed Intensive Care Unit to review the condition of each patient, using the institute's checklist as a guide. The doctor on duty is briefed by the nurses, and a pharmacist, dieti-

tian, respiratory therapist, social worker and chaplain are on hand discussing treatment options and how to keep family members informed.

The review is more thorough, with more departments represented, than before the 100,000 Lives Campaign. The checklist is updated with the latest in proven care practices, which helps doctors who may not have time to read the most recent studies.

In one such study, researchers found that infections did not increase when the circuits were changed less frequently on the breathing machine.

"We were doing a lot of things right," said Dr. Michael Ellison, director of respiratory care and a staff member at Dominican since 1993. "We wanted to do things close to perfect."

Making changes is easier said than done.

"No matter what you do, change is somewhat scary until you see the good results," said Ellison. "Once outcomes improve, those who were resistant to change are the biggest fans."

Procedures are always open to review, and nurses and other staff members are encouraged to provide input.

"Everybody contributing — that's why we have been so successful," Ellison said.

### Leading the way

Dominican started down the path of improvement based on data-driven decision-making after several managers attended a conference 15 years ago on "Total Quality Management." That led hospital staff to the Baldrige model of self-assessment, and then to Berwick, who founded the Insti-

### How to save lives

#### NEW STEPS FOR 5 MILLION LIVES

- Prevent deadly staph infection.
- Reduce harm from medications such as sedatives, narcotics and insulin.
- Reduce surgical complications.
- Prevent pressure ulcers.
- Reduce readmissions for heart failure.
- Educate hospital boards about improving care.
- Steps from 100,000 Lives.
- Rapid response teams at first sign of patient decline.
- Change care to prevent fatal heart attacks.
- Prevent medication errors.
- Prevent catheter infections.
- Prevent surgical site infections.
- Prevent pneumonia for patients on a breathing tube.

Source: Institute for Healthcare Improvement, [www.ihl.org](http://www.ihl.org)

tute for Healthcare Improvement in 1991.

Berwick's efforts gained steam after a 1999 national report found up to 98,000 people die in hospitals each year due to medical errors. He called for change, discovering practices proven to save lives and building a network to share that information.

Dominican joined the institute in 1997 and later became part of a San Francisco Bay Area collaborative formed to improve patient safety. Dominican's parent organization, Catholic Healthcare West, followed suit, and Sutter Health, the parent of Sutter Maternity and Surgery Center in Santa Cruz, also

is a member.

Vanderpool, who has a master's degree in computer science and joined the hospital as chief information officer 22 years ago, enjoys the challenge of system improvement.

"With any process of improvement, usually the ideas are simple, but they're not easy to carry out," he said. "You have to engage your work force in a way that everybody can be educated and change their day-to-day activity."

### Responding rapidly

Besides the pneumonia prevention effort, Dominican has created "rapid response teams" to react at the first sign that a patient's condition is worsening. That strategy led to a 65 percent drop in cardiac arrests and a 37 percent reduction in mortality at Austin Hospital in Heidelberg, Australia.

Victoria Lester was impressed by Dominican's attention to detail when she was a patient in December.

Lester, 60, a checker at Johnnie's Grocery in Boulder Creek, had the shock of her life when her doctor said she would die unless she got open-heart surgery before Christmas. A fever triggered a quick response by doctors, who put off surgery until she recovered from the infection.

Meanwhile, hospital staff told her what to expect, connected her with the Mended Hearts support group, and brought in advocates to ease her stress over being uninsured.

"I'm in awe of the attention," Lester said.

For Dominican Hospital, the benefits extend beyond the quality of patient care. If the ICU operates more efficiently and shortens

patient stays, that frees up beds and increases capacity, making a multimillion-dollar expansion unnecessary.

As more hospitals report improvements, more join the patient safety movement, with more than 200 organizations part of the institute's network for change.

In June, Berwick reported on the success of the campaign to save 100,000 lives, based on mortality data submitted by three-fourths of the 3,000 participating hospitals. Last month, he announced a new campaign, 5 Million Lives, to cut the 15 million incidents of harm in hospitals by one-third over the next two years. The goal is for 4,000 hospitals to undergo a dozen changes, including six new life-saving practices.

Dominican Hospital has signed up again.

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