What is a Tracer

- Tracer is the Joint Commission International key assessment method implemented in the US 2004 and used internationally in 2007
- Tracer: is the tracking of a patients’ care throughout the entire organization, using patient medical record as a guide
- Along the path, JCI surveyors observes and assess compliance with the standards
- Tracing activity allows surveyors to assess organizational systems and processes

Outline

- Tracer definition
- Outcome of tracers
- Types of Tracers
  - Individual Tracer
  - System Tracer
- Tracers Preparation
- Effective Tracing Tips & Interviewing Strategies
Tracers are an effective way to study complex systems. The focus of the survey tracers is on the safety and quality of care provided. If we can identify the flaws within a system, we can understand how to correct errors that may cause patient harm.

What is a Tracer
- Integrated and cross sectional review of those areas most critical to quality and safety of the patient.
- Patient focused analysis of standard compliance.
- Organizational specific information that can be used to design and target improvements.

Tracers Outcome
- Identify the strengths and effectiveness of process design in the delivery of safe, high-quality health care.
- Generate ideas for how to improve processes.
- Educate staff about the accreditation process and help them to feel more comfortable interacting with surveyors during the on-site evaluation.

Mock Tracers Benefit
Gain staff buy-in for accreditation by demonstrating how their work fits in with standards compliance and the goal to deliver safe, high quality care.

Identify areas of standards noncompliance.

Mock Tracers Benefit

Types of Tracers

Surveyors conduct 2 types of tracers:

- Individual Tracers (also called Patient Tracers)
- System Tracers (Medication, Infection Control & Data)

- **Individual Tracer**: Follow the treatment path of an individual patient within the hospital

- **System Tracer**: Follow a process in the hospital from beginning to end

Individual Tracer

- Follows the experiences of a patient throughout the healthcare system
- Illustrates the relationship between a patient’s care and the JCI standards
- Surveyors are interested in patients who have received complex care
- Tracer allows more access to all parts of the organization
The tracer begins where the patient is currently located.

One tracer can take from 1 hr to 3 hrs.

Tracer includes interviews, medical record review and observations.

Examples of tracer activities:
- Medication Management System
- Infection Control Management System
- Data Management System
System Tracers

System Tracers address the following:
- The flow of the process across the organization, including identification of risk patients and how they are managed
- Areas that need improvement
- Baseline assessment of standards compliance
- Education, as appropriate

Medication Management System Tracers

Includes:

Group discussion
- Explore the process; identify concerns
- Discuss medication occurrences or errors
- Review International Pt. Safety Goals (INPSG 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6)

Focused Medication Tracer
- Explore the path of a selected high risk medication based on the group discussion or previous information identified through patient tracers

Medication Management System Tracers

- Medication Management Functions:
  - Selection
  - Procurement
  - Storage
  - Prescribing and Ordering
  - Preparation
  - Dispensing
  - Administration
  - Monitoring
Tracing

Tracing – Determine Your Purpose

- What is the purpose of the tracer?
  - Assess overall JCI standards
  - Assess organizational policy compliance
  - Lean more about a specific process

- The purpose will determine where to go and what to do

Tracing – Pre-work

- At first, do not plan to do tracers within your own department
- Know and interpret the standards correctly
- Understand the intent of the standard
- Consider pre-determining types of questions (i.e. a focused topic area) until you are proficient at free-flowing
Effective Tracing Tips

- Don’t review the medical record by yourself – review with a staff member, so that you can ask for the “patient story”
- Don’t conduct “peer” review
- Don’t indicate staff did something “wrong”
- Don’t assess best practices, focus on what the standards require

Effective Tracing Tips

- Follow the path of the patient or process
- Assess standards based on the patient’s experience of care
- Use the patient record to identify “system” issues based on the patient’s journey

Effective Tracing Tips

- Don’t interrupt patient care
- Stay time aware and topic focused
- Remain flexible
- Maintain patient confidentiality
- Set the proper tone
Effective Tracing Tips

- Put the staff at ease
- Explain purpose of tracer
- Dress professionally
- Use a serious but approachable style

Effective Tracing Tips

- Educate and evaluate
- Pretend you don’t know the staff members you are interviewing
- Thank staff for participating

Interviewing Strategy

Questions to keep in mind while tracing any process:
- Is this step standardized? If not, why?
- Does the step occur consistently?
- Does it need improvement?
- Is it an unnecessary or impractical step?
- Is something absent that should be present?
- What are the risk points?
- How are the risk points mitigated?
Use active listening
Drill down until issues are fully developed
Don’t pursue one standard; focus on several standards related to a process
Avoid hypothetical situations – pose questions around the patient being traced

Base questions and findings on the standards
Question staff, not management
Question patients when feasible

Ask questions based on your review of the patient’s medical record (diet, education)
Talk to patients /families about relevant issues/experiences; use caution not to alarm the patient
Observe environment of care in the patient’s room
Don’t “quiz” patient but engage in conversation
How are questions asked?

- Use "I" statements
  - I see that the patient was given Aspirin
  - Not, "You gave the patient Aspirin"

- Avoid a confrontational tone; the goal is to gather information, not "catch" someone

- Use opening question followed by "drill-downs"
  - The same question, asked slightly different, may deepen understanding of compliance

Leading vs. Neutral Questions

- Whenever possible, avoid leading type of questions
  - Leading questions suggest the correct answer. Examples:
    - Do you always wash your hands before interacting with a patient?
  - Neutral questions do not suggest the correct answer. Example:
    - What kind of hand-washing protocols have you adopted? How effective have hand-washing protocols been?

Closed vs. Open Questions

- Whenever possible, avoid closed type of questions
  - The respondent for closed type questions supplies a very limited amount of information to the questioner. Example:
    - Have you been trained to operate this equipment? (Yes/No)
  - Open questions require a full, elaborative response. Example:
    - How do you know the correct way to operate this equipment?
After the Questions

- Make sure the question was understood
- Restate answers for clarification
- Pause after an answer to encourage more information
- Give positive feedback for well-thought out answers
- Ask more information if you need it in order to understand the answer

Validate

When you notice a policy violation or an inconsistency in clinical practice, you should:
  - Drill down
    - Ask probing questions to more fully understand the problem
  - Validate
    - Look for examples of the problem in other settings or with other practitioners. Is this an isolated incident, or a trend

After the Tracer: Share findings

Share with leadership
  - Share all findings to lay groundwork for new improvements; communicate incremental responses to changes

Share with staff
  - Share successes and challenges
  - The clearest and most accurate picture creates respect for the tracer process
  - Issues should be shared in a non-punitive,