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## MISSOURI TEAM QUALITY AWARD RECIPIENT

### **BLOOD CONSERVATION STEERING TEAM** at SSM Health Care, St. Louis



#### **PROFILE**

SSM Health Care–St. Louis is a network of five acute care hospitals, a tertiary care pediatric hospital, an acute rehabilitation hospital, and a physician organization comprised of 140 physicians. In addition, over 2,000 independently practicing physicians are members of the medical staff at the seven hospitals. The network annually cares for nearly 80,000 acute hospital admissions, 210,000 emergency room visits, and 800,000 outpatient visits. SSM Health Care–St. Louis is a vital part of SSM Health Care, a national system comprised of 19 acute care hospitals. The mission of SSM Health care–*Through our exceptional health care services, we reveal the healing presence of God*– is deployed throughout the system with a focus on creating exceptional clinical outcomes, exceptional patient, employee and physician satisfaction, and exceptional financial performance.

#### **OPPORTUNITY FOR IMPROVEMENT**

In early 2004, through its annual Strategic, Financial and Human Resource Planning process, the network identified blood conservation as an opportunity for improvement. A comprehensive review of the literature and existing hospital transfusion practices clearly identified an opportunity to reduce the use of blood and blood products, which at the time was the second largest single supply expenditure for the network at nearly \$8 million annually. The evidence in the literature was clear that avoiding blood transfusions reduced mortality, lowered the incidence of infections, heart attacks and heart failure, and shortened length of stay. In addition, it would improve

patient safety by eliminating the possibility of transfusion reactions. The team was chartered and established a 20% reduction in the use of blood as its initial goal. It was believed by the network team that achieving this goal would not only improve clinical outcomes for patients, but would improve financial performance through reduced blood purchases.

#### **TEAM ACTIONS**

The team identified a number of opportunities to reduce the use of blood, but decided on three specific initiatives to standardize in the network hospitals. These initiatives included restricting phlebotomy (the drawing of blood for clinical testing and diagnosis), reducing autologous transfusions (where patients donate their own blood prior to surgery), and standardizing and improving compliance with evidence-based transfusion criteria. Local hospital champions led these initiatives at each facility to gain acceptance of key hospital stakeholders, primarily physicians and nursing staff.

#### **RESULTS**

Comparing total units of blood transfused from 2004 through May of 2005, the network was on track to reduce transfusions by 22%. The use of autologous blood for total knee replacements was reduced 62%, and a 19.5% reduction in blood product purchases per adjusted patient day had been achieved.

#### **FUTURE PLANS**

The team is continuing to meet and will focus its improvement efforts in the future on three other specific initiatives – intra-operative blood salvage, the detection and treatment of preoperative anemia, and the selective use of epogen (a drug used for the treatment of anemia that stimulates the production of red blood cells and reduces the need for transfusions). In addition, the team plans to use patient focus groups to determine if a program to educate patients on risks and benefits of transfusion would be effective. During the initial improvement phase, the network's blood product supplier was reluctant and declined participation on the team, viewing it as counteractive to their business. Through extended outreach and communication efforts, the blood product supplier has changed their position on the issue and is now willing to provide representatives to serve as team members.



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