



Standardized Work: COVID Response Made Easier and Safer

As we continue to travel through the uncharted waters COVID-19 has thrust us into, it is clear the need for **Standardized Work** has never been greater. As guidance and recommendations change, it is imperative that the people doing the work know what they are supposed to do, and how to do it well. As new processes and procedures are being implemented, it is critical that everyone involved understands the new processes and the work requirements. When people do the same task, but differently, it increases the opportunities for errors and breaches in safety protocols. A lack of a **Standard Work** process puts people at risk.

Standardized Work is the agreed upon and documented best known practices to perform a defined task. This method and approach consistently optimizes the safety, quality and efficiency output of the task. Standardized Work is used to:

- Train employees so that all employees perform tasks consistently
- Audit work to ensure process consistency and that all employees are following the agreed upon best evidence-based practice
- Aid in both Problem Solving and Continuous Improvement processes and methodologies

The need to implement standardized work processes is growing. Automotive manufacturers are attempting to produce ventilators. Garment manufacturers are producing medical gowns and masks. Medical testing and triage centers are being established in convention centers and athletic complexes.

All these efforts, and others that are similar, are great opportunities for their respective organizations to put robust Standardized Work systems in place. Some organizations are asking their people to manufacture an entirely new product. Given the urgency of these new production requirements, those organizations who wholly embrace utilizing Standardized Work will have the advantage of being able to quickly and consistently produce the volume required at a high level of quality.

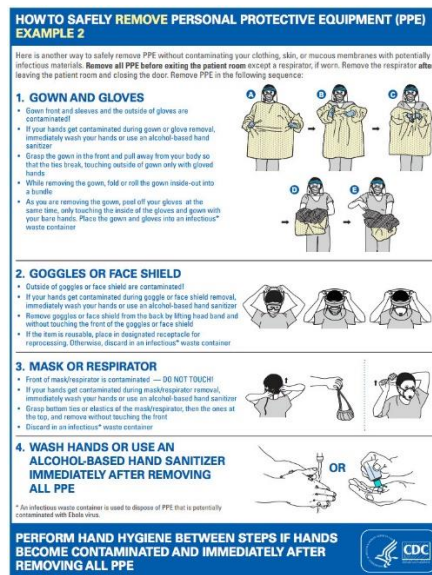
Under normal circumstances employees are typically '*experts*' at their jobs. With the changes forced by the pandemic we have now introduced significant and necessary changes into their environments that no longer allow them to function at the '*expert*' level they did before the changes went into effect. For example, a medical insurance claims processor may no longer work in the office and instead works from home. A previously straightforward task of processing a claim may now require additional processing steps and time because of the new environment and accommodations to telework.

In addition to the changes in the work flow for the individual, once the entire claims department is working from home, how can we help ensure that all employees are following the same processes? When employees follow different processes it almost guarantees that customers will see inconsistent and varied turnaround times for their claims. Given the financial impact the current pandemic is having, it is vital that insurance claim processing be done in a consistent and efficient manner in order to ensure the most

accurate and quickest turnaround time possible for the insurance company's customers. Standardizing the workflow to respond to the changes in the process supports a well-functioning and Lean organization.

Recently a major midwestern city was tagged as a new COVID-19 'Hot Spot'. In order to expand medical facility capacity, the city is transforming its convention center into a trauma unit. Highly trained medical professionals, the 'experts' in their fields, are not going to perform the tasks they have always done in their 'home' environment but are going to be thrust into an entirely foreign physical work environment. Work Standards combined with a strong Visual Management System will help those medical professionals become more effective in performing their life saving jobs.

Work standards don't have to be complicated. Sometimes they can be communicated by something as simple as a checklist or a visual management tool for a process like removing personal protective gear. It is extremely important for everyone to do the same thing, each time, in the recommended way to keep both patients and staff safe. The poster below illustrates this type of standardized work process.



Moving forward past the pandemic, many industries and companies are going to look drastically different. The world as we knew it and how we get work done is likely going to change permanently for many organizations. For example, clinicians may rely on telemedicine more heavily than they did before the pandemic. So, it is vitally important that during this transition that new processes are well documented by engaging those who are being asked to perform them and then to document and standardize the improvements as they occur.

Again, we must all keep in mind that Standardized Work is a 'dynamic' process. Just because it is 'standardized' doesn't mean it can't be adjusted or changed. Tweaks to a process are good and makes the process better, but the new processes and standards must be communicated well and trained.

It will be incumbent on all organizations to keep a strong open mind, and to make every effort to learn from their employees. Once those ideas and lessons learned are captured, we will develop a strong Standardized Work system that will help all of us Lean into our new world in a more effective and efficient manner. If you have any questions, or need more information please contact us at www.opsinc.com or 410-871-0995. We are here to help.

Robert Klym
Lean Consultant and Operations Manager
Operational Performance Solutions