



How can we improve  
quality and be the safest  
hospital possible?

# A new approach to reducing medical errors



*Xavier Pombar, DO*



Robin L. Jones, MD

In the operating room, one mistake can mean the difference between success and failure. In the air, one misunderstanding can mean the difference between smooth flying and disaster. While the aviation and health care industries have vast differences, they have at least one similarity — the need for clear, effective communication.

Health care training typically focuses on technical skills, but evaluation of medical errors often identifies communication failures as the root cause of adverse effects. Rush has engaged LifeWings Partners LLC, a company that trains medical workers in communication techniques used in the aviation industry, to identify and eliminate potentially life-threatening communication

breakdowns. The program, called crew resource management, aims to improve performance in high-risk clinical situations where care standards and team communication are critical to patient safety and positive outcomes.

Rush began testing the program in Women's Health Services with a multidisciplinary team composed of Robin Jones, MD, and Xavier Pombar, DO, assistant professors of obstetrics and gynecology, and Marcia Patterson, RN, MSN, unit director in labor and delivery. The program will eventually be incorporated into intensive care units, operating rooms and the Emergency Department — all places where clearer caregiver communication translates to quicker, safer, more accurate responses for patients in distress.



**LifeWings training** includes the use of structured checklists and situational awareness at the beginning and end of shifts and hinges on the idea that it is the obligation of every team member to speak up when anything is out of the ordinary or falls outside of the standard procedure.

**Out of the LifeWings training process** have come a number of improvements focused on standardizing communication and increasing collaboration. New procedures like the OB Huddle, a twice-daily meeting of interdisciplinary caregivers, and the OBdocCOMM system, a standardized text paging system designed to prioritize and provide a framework for reasonable response times, have already made an impact on patient safety and team communication.