

## Program takes wing at hospital

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It's 7 a.m., time for a shift change at Salem Hospital's Family Birth Center.

More than 20 nurses, doctors, an anesthesiologist and other hospital staff members gather around a table on the labor and delivery floor and introduce themselves.

Many start to jot notes as they listen to charge nurse Kimberly Hewitt run through a checklist of items for the day: provider coverage, scheduled procedures, patients' names and conditions, and red flags.

The quick meeting wraps up with questions, concerns and assignments.

"Everybody have a great safe day," Hewitt says as the room empties.

The meeting, known as the huddle, is among the new tools that have been implemented at the birth center to reduce medical errors and improve patient safety.

They were developed as part of a program called LifeWings that trains medical workers in communication and teamwork techniques used in the aviation industry. About 400 doctors, nurses and others at the Family Birth Center have been trained so far.

"This has moved us to being a much safer organization," said Laurie McKeown, a patient-safety officer at Salem Hospital. "We've created a safer environment for the community to deliver babies."

The training program, taught by Tennessee-based LifeWings Partners, teaches "crew resource management" techniques initially developed for airline crews to help prevent human error. It aims to strengthen communication, build teamwork and standardize processes in health-care organizations.

LifeWings resulted from the publication of a report by the Institute of Medicine in 1999 that estimated between 44,000 and 98,000 Americans die each year from medical errors.

Salem Hospital officials began considering the program in 2006 as part of its push to improve overall performance, said Judy Marvin, medical director of women's services at the hospital. LifeWings was brought in last year, with training kicking off in the fall. Since then, officials have taken the concepts they learned to develop tools that have become standard behavior at the birth center.



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Lori Kampmann (seated from right), Carrie Horner and Lori Bohler participate in a huddle in June at the Salem Hospital Family Birth Center.

### Recognition

Northwest Physicians Insurance Company's Obstetrical Collaborative gave Salem Hospital an award for "Outstanding Dedication to the Advancement of Obstetrical Patient Safety" in May. It recognized the hospital's leadership in adopting crew resource management principals.

To learn more about LifeWings, visit [www.saferpatients.com](http://www.saferpatients.com).

They range from team discussions before surgical procedures — to make sure everyone and everything is ready — to detailed reports that follow patients throughout their hospital stay. Many of the tools center on a checklist or worksheet that captures and preserves information that used to be subject to memory, passed on orally and at risk of being lost.

Nurses, for example, now fill out a worksheet for each patient that includes a due date, blood type, gestational age and other pertinent information. That sheet is handed off from nurse to nurse as a patient moves through different units of care, such as labor and delivery to the mother and baby unit, Marvin said.

"It helps with communication," Hewitt said. "There's less gaps in information that way."

A standard report also helps ensure there aren't variations in the way things are done, officials said. That creates a high level of reliability and safety.

Marvin said group discussions before and after procedures encourage people to speak up and give input before problems arise.

"It builds a comfort level around giving feedback," she said.

LifeWings training is expected to spread to other departments at Salem Hospital. The pediatric department recently has been trained.

Elsewhere in Oregon, PeaceHealth Hospital Systems and Oregon Health and Science University are clients of LifeWings, according to the company's Web site.

Nationwide, LifeWings has worked with about 85 organizations. Additional hospitals are doing similar teamwork and communication training internally.

"It's a pretty a broad-scale movement," said Steve Montague, a vice president of client services for LifeWings and a commercial airline pilot.

At other hospitals, the LifeWings program has resulted in fewer medical errors and wrong surgeries, improved pre-procedure antibiotic administration and reduced turnover. Salem Hospital officials said it's too early to measure the program's success at the Family Birth Center, but patient outcomes are expected to improve.

Regular audits are conducted to make sure the new tools and processes are being followed. Already, compliance in every category is at or near 100 percent.

"We know now that we have a far more reliable process," McKeown said. "That will lead to diminished morbidity and mortality."

Montague praised Salem Hospital as having implemented LifeWings better and more rapidly than just about any other organization he's worked with.

"They have executed it exceptionally," he said. "They're really on top of it and tracking it. They're taking measure to ensure it succeeds."

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