



Pittsburgh Regional Healthcare Initiative

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Sort, Set in order, Shine, Standardize, Sustain

5-S catches on at the VA

Every business would like to improve productivity, reduce defects, meet deadlines, and provide everyone with a safer place to work. Yet in a complex hospital, making these kinds of major improvements might seem next to impossible.

At the 4 West Learning Unit at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System, staff discovered a relatively simple, rapid, low-cost, low-tech way of making these improvements. It's called 5-S.

A little history

Before World War II, many American businesses had codified the idea that a clean workplace is a productive workplace. In America, by and large the idea remained in manuals, without being translated to the workplace. As Americans helped the Japanese reconstruct their industries after the war, they brought their ideas, and found the Japanese to be ready students.

Before long, the Western idea of the orderly and productive workplace became tied to the Eastern idea of deep respect for the worker's wellbeing and morale. Out of this blend of philosophies came a technique for creating the orderly workplace, a technique directed not by a distant manager, but by the esteemed worker.

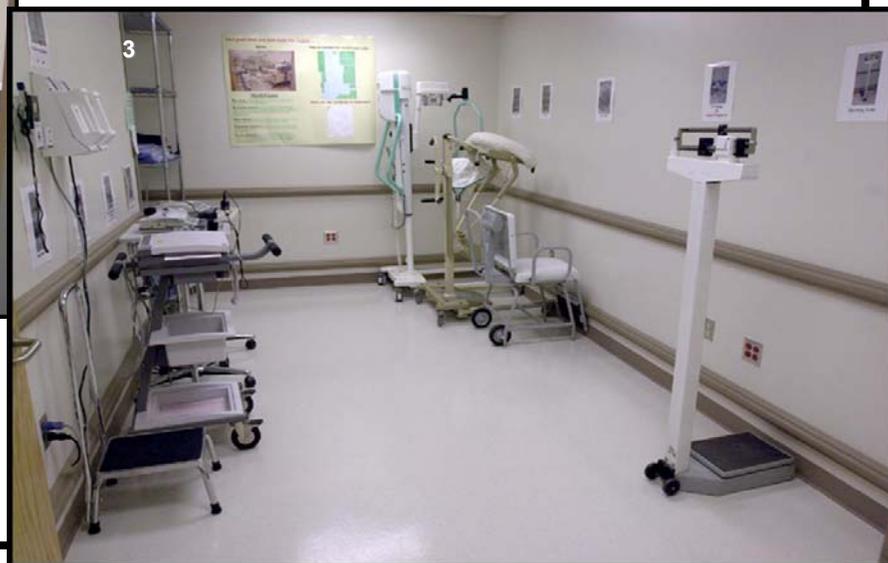


What are the five S's?

The name, "5-S," refers to a sequence of steps that translate approximately as follows:

✧ **Sort.** Remove all items from the workplace that are not needed for current operations. A crowded workplace is hard to work in and costly to maintain.

✧ **Set in order.** Arrange needed items so that they are easy to use. Label them so that they're easy to find, clean and put away. This degree of order improves communication and reduces the frustration of



- 1- Typical storage room in any American hospital
- 2- Crew at VAPHS amid 5-S process
- 3- Completed project. Wall posters visually delineate what goes where, how to clean and store.
- 4- Adequate electrical outlets mean equipment is always charged.

wasted time and motion.

- ❖ **Shine.** Clean the floors, walls, and equipment. When things are kept in top condition, when someone needs to use something, it is always ready. In a hospital environment, cleanliness is extremely important to staff member and patient alike.
- ❖ **Standardize.** By integrating the first three steps into everyday work, “backsliding” is eliminated.
- ❖ **Sustain.** If the rewards for keeping order outweigh the rewards for going back to the old way of doing things, people will make orderliness a habit.

Practicing 5-S at the VA

About a year ago, the workers on 4 West, the inpatient surgical unit, took a long look at their Equipment Storage Room. It looked like a typical storage room in any American hospital—a mix of often- and seldom-used equipment, stored in no particular order. It took time to find equipment, and it was difficult to walk around in the room. Items relying on recharged batteries were not always plugged in. It wasn't clear where or in what condition things were supposed to be stored.

Following a deliberate process over a few weeks, staff members on 4 West were able to reduce the inventory in the room, while still maintaining access to what they needed when they needed it. About \$20,000-worth of seldom used equipment was freed up for use in other areas of the hospital.

Signs clearly denote where each piece of equipment is to be stored, how it is to be cleaned, whether it is to be plugged in, etc. The visual cues leave no doubt about the expectations.

Since the 5-S, the room and equipment have been maintained in sparkling clean condition with little problem. Since cleaning is built into the work itself, backsliding is minimal.

So well has the Equipment Storage Room worked that staffers on other units are now learning 5-S. In short order, units on the fifth and sixth floors are

Results on 4 West*

- ❖ Approximately \$20,000 in equipment freed up.
- ❖ Reduced time to access, clean and store equipment.
- ❖ Equipment always clean and ready for use.
- ❖ Safer work environment

* similar improvements expected on floors 5 and 6

organizing their storage rooms according to the principles.

“It’s not just a matter of cleaning out your closet,” says Peter Perreiah, PRHI’s team leader at the VA. “It’s about honoring the worker with a clean, safe environment, and honoring patients with equipment that’s always clean and ready.”

5-S catches on

When she saw the Equipment Storage Room on 4 West, Shedale Pinnix-Tindall, Nurse Manager on 6 West, thought it could work in her unit as well. Nobody asked her to do it. But she and Marianne Allen, 6 West Charge Nurse, asked for help and soon got started.

“Who could be against this? Having the storage areas orderly like this really saves time and frustration. It’s better for patients,” says Shedale, “and it’s not hard to keep it this way.”

Says Environmental Aide, John R. Finkley, “Since we did the 5-S on 4 West, we can get what we need easily and quickly for every patient. There’s no guessing. You just open the door and go right to the item. I find that I spend less time cleaning that room, so there’s more time to clean every piece of equipment thoroughly. It’s all part of the routine now.” ✂



IV pumps always plugged in when stored

