

kare11.com Printables[Print this Page](#) | [Close this Window](#)**Auto concept drives Park Nicollet strategy**

The latest issue of the Lancet, the British Medical Journal praises Minnesota's Park Nicollet Clinic for taking a cue from Japanese automaker Toyota.

The company is renowned for its production efficiency and the medical provider has adopted a "Lean Production" concept that reduces steps by patients and staff. The system aims to streamline and improve health care by eliminating waste.

On the fourth floor of Methodist Hospital in St. Louis Park, the Clinic set up cardboard concepts of its planned new cancer center. They then color-coded the paths of patients and staff traveling from one area of the hospital to another.

"We mapped those out in this yarn," explains Senior Vice President Jennifer Nelson. "Our patients, which is the red yarn here, travel extensively throughout our system to get their care. And in fact, a lung cancer patient goes back and forth between the two campuses 36 different times in the course of their treatment."

The "two campuses" refers to Methodist and the new cancer center. By studying the lines of colored thread, the design team has come up with ways to cut steps and improve service. CEO David Wessner is steering Park Nicollet into the Toyota model. "We're using this program, these techniques of Toyota to engage all our people into rapidly improving health care."

Examples of how the clinic has been applying the new "no waste" approach can be found in the surgical suites. General surgeons have agreed on sets of standard instruments for various surgical procedures. As a result, staff can sterilize 40,000 fewer instruments each month, saving thousands of dollars.

Determined to cut waiting time for patients and staff, Methodist has broken from the old "batching" system of scheduling patients for appointments in groups of five, to a "waterfall" system in which patients arrive and depart one at a time in a continuous flow. Says Wessner, "We have an overall goal of trying to reduce the time that our patients spend in care by half, cut the time in half."

It's not as though they're driving Toyotas around Methodist Hospital, but Park Nicollet claims the same ideas that produce sedans are now driving cost savings and improving patient care and safety.

The Clinic says it has saved about \$15 million in just two years, money that has been used to reduce charges to uninsured patients.

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