

Toyota Partners with Tree of Life Clinic to Improve the Process of Providing Quality Free Health Care

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TUPELO, Miss., July 9, 2013 – Mary Ware arrives at the Tree of Life Clinic in Tupelo at 6:40 a.m. to ensure she will have a place in line for treatment when the free medical clinic opens at 4:30 that afternoon. Now, with the efficiencies instituted in the clinic – thanks to the partnership with Toyota – she can arrive later with assurance she will be seen that day.

Since January, members of the Toyota Production System Support Center (TSSC) and Toyota Motor Manufacturing, Mississippi have partnered with Tree of Life Clinic to provide on-site support – free of charge – helping to improve the clinic flow while preserving doctor/patient interaction time. The improvements include increasing the number of patients seen while reducing waiting time for those patients by an average of 24 minutes and decreasing the length of the clinic workday for volunteers by an average of one hour.

Established in 2010, Tree of Life Clinic is a free medical clinic that provides basic medical and dental care for people in North Mississippi that is fully staffed by volunteers and 100% funded by donations. Open two days a month (1st Wednesday and 3rd Saturday), the clinic sees approximately 80 patients on Wednesdays and 120 on Saturdays for those who do not have health insurance, cannot afford to pay for medical care or may not be eligible for Medicare/Medicaid.

“When we opened Tree of Life Clinic we knew there was a need for medical services for people with no health insurance and not eligible for Medicare or Medicaid, and we were overwhelmed with patients from the first day,” said Polly Bailey, clinic manager and co-founder with her physician-husband Dr. Joe Bailey. “Every person on our staff is a volunteer. We have always worked hard to ensure that we provide the best service with the increasing influx of patients. Now we want to take the concepts Toyota has shown us and incorporate them along with the philosophy of continuous improvement to provide the best care with the facilities and volunteer staff we have.”

Toyota, through its nonprofit arm, TSSC, shares its manufacturing know-how to help nonprofits and small to mid-size manufacturing companies optimize the way they work by making substantial ‘process improvements’ by increasing safety, quality, productivity and decreasing costs. Nearly 200 organizations – including some of North America’s most successful enterprises – have used TSSC’s support.

Toyota Mississippi President Masafumi Hamaguchi added, “Toyota Mississippi partnered with TSSC and the Tree of Life Clinic to work on this project. It is Toyota Mississippi’s honor to help the clinic better serve their customers. We are happy to donate our time and energy to this important community project.”

Lisa Richardson, TSSC’s project leader, explained, “Specifically, we worked on improving the patient and volunteer experience. On one hand the volunteers (doctors, nurses, pharmacies and support staff) work long hours and on the other patients are willing to wait for long periods of time to guarantee that they’re seen by the doctor. So we focused on several improvements to maximize everyone’s experience,” she added.

Some improvements include:

- Re-organizing the lobby to maximize patient flow

- Improving the filing system helped reduce check-in process time (30% of files were purged and a new filing system was introduced);
- Standardizing the quantity and location of supplies in the pharmacy and exam room.

By implementing these improvements, the Wednesday shift pharmacy staff has finished as early as 8:30 p.m. where previously volunteers worked until 9:30 or 10 p.m. And from the moment the patient checks-in until they leave, the average wait time reduction per patient is 24 minutes.

TSSC, a subsidiary of Toyota's manufacturing & engineering headquarters in Erlanger, Ky., shares Toyota's manufacturing know-how with nonprofits like Tree of Life Clinic by focusing on process improvement activities 'doing more with less' in a condensed manner. TSSC's on-site support typically lasts 3-6 months. The idea is for the leaders of the nonprofit to learn Toyota's manufacturing know-how so they can teach it to their team and become self-reliant.

"This project with Tree of Life has been fulfilling," Doug Formby, Toyota Mississippi vice president, exclaimed. "Not only for the team that worked tirelessly on this project, but for other Mississippi team members that volunteer their personal time here. It is our intent to continue this relationship with Tree of Life Clinic."

Additionally, Toyota provided a \$20,000 grant for medications.

The Tree of Life Clinic video can be accessed on the TSSC website at www.tssc.com. Once you reach this page, please click on the Tree of Life Clinic Video button.