

Cutting-Edge Patient Safety Training Taking Flight at UCSD Medical Center

April 09, 2007 |

The surgical team cares for patients in the 2nd floor operating rooms. The flight crew cares for passengers high above the ground.

At UCSD Medical Center those two worlds are coming together to lift patient care to the highest level.

UCSD Medical Center, along with UC Medical Centers systemwide, is teaming up with LifeWings Partners, LLC, to improve patient safety and risk management. LifeWings, founded by a former U.S. Navy flight instructor and commercial airline pilot, applies to healthcare the same training that has made commercial aviation safe and reliable.

"What we're trying to do is improve the level of collaboration and communication for people who have to work as a team, under a lot of stress, without a lot of time to do it," says Steve Harden, LifeWings President. "This speaks for just how cutting edge UC is when it comes to safety and quality. A systems-wide approach is more effective and provides greater reliability and standardization. UC is leading the way."

"The members of our surgical faculty are experts in their individual fields of surgery, but teams of experts don't instantly become expert teams," says Mark Talamini, MD, FACS, Professor and Chairman of the [UCSD Department of Surgery](#). "We take this team training as seriously as we take our training in surgical technique. We're putting our physician experts through this training, alongside our surgery staff and physicians in training, so we can achieve the highest level of reliability for our patients."

According to the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO), the primary cause of patient harm is "communication failure." The LifeWings goal is to develop a culture where there is no fear about speaking up if something is potentially not right or unsafe for the patient.

Harden says, "It's a 'stop-the-line' culture. Anybody on the team who is part of the process can stop the line when they have a legitimate concern about the safety of the operation."

LifeWings' expert instructors include NASA astronaut Rhea Seddon, M.D., Assistant Chief Medical Officer of the Vanderbilt Medical Group, the largest physician practice group in the Mid South region. The University of California Medical Centers chose LifeWings because of its affiliation with an established, respected academic hospital, Vanderbilt University Medical Center.

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