Not long ago, the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and Med-IQ offered the live educational activity “Improving Acute Coronary Syndromes Management: A Hospital-Specific, CME/CE-Certified Quality Improvement Initiative” at your institution. This training provided specialized education on Crew Resource Management (CRM) techniques, an aviation-industry–based approach to quality improvement, and focused on applying these techniques in the healthcare setting to reduce medical errors.

In the spirit of continuous learning and periodic reinforcement, your CRM leaders, Captains Jack Barker, PhD, and Jeff Cyr, have developed six short e-briefs that will be delivered to your in-box on a monthly basis. These e-briefs are designed to serve as refreshers on key CRM concepts. Below, you’ll find the third of these e-briefs, which focuses on creating a culture of safety. Be sure to stay tuned for future installments.

Your Role in Patient Safety

Creating a robust, self-sustaining safety culture in a hospital setting is no small undertaking, but it can certainly be accomplished with the right leadership, training, guidance, and support. Everyone in the facility/unit has a role to play as an agent for change. We can’t emphasize enough how important it is for each individual team member—including YOU—to acknowledge their own role and responsibility in moving to a culture of safety. So let’s talk about what YOU can do to foster culture change and help improve patient outcomes.

It’s All About Attitude

The key to fostering culture change is to make sure you are part of the solution and not part of the problem. The most critical element of culture that you can contribute positively to on a daily basis is ATTITUDE. Individual attitudes play a large role in establishing the team climate, and a positive team climate is an essential characteristic of successful teams in any high-risk endeavor. In contrast, it is often the caustic, negative attitudes that weigh heavily on work environments and whittle away at a unit’s culture.

Attitude is a CHOICE. This simple statement comes as a surprise to many. Make it YOUR choice to have a positive attitude at work, and go out of your way to boost others up when they seem to be having a bad day. Being a positive influence is an excellent team-building skill and can be infectious in the correct setting.

Get Into the Baseball Stance

But wait—you can do even more than simply change your attitude. Have you ever admired a third baseman’s lightning-fast reaction when a line drive is coming at him? You watch the wind-up, the 95-mph fast ball, the swing that sends the ball racing towards him, and—before you can blink—you expect the ball to be halfway
into left field. Until...the third baseman leaps or dives, grabs the ball out of thin air, and gets the out in what seems like a millisecond.

I think we all recognize that the third baseman would never be able to catch that line drive if he weren’t always waiting for it. He’s assuming, with every pitch, that the batter is going to hit a line drive right at him. Even though we know that it doesn’t happen every time, or even very often (line drives to third base are rare), if the third baseman weren’t always ready and on guard, he would not be able to successfully catch that ball.

Similarly, to improve your chances of remaining error-free in the delivery of healthcare, you must develop a heightened sense of awareness, just like the third baseman. We like to call this the “ready stance” or the “baseball stance.” Every day when you go to work, you have to remind yourself that you are part of an error chain that could lead to patient harm. Each day, there is a lurking medical error that is waiting for you to drop your guard so it can develop into patient harm or a sentinel event. Make it part of your professional routine to acknowledge this risk and accept the need for constant vigilance. Like Smokey the Bear says, “Only YOU can prevent...” medical mistakes.

Establishing a robust safety culture in your work environment is a critical component in providing safer healthcare. Change has to begin with you, and developing a positive, professional attitude as well as getting your mind in “the baseball stance” to stop a potential error are important first steps. Next month, we’ll talk about a leadership element that plays a key role in fostering teamwork.