

(UNCLASSIFIED)

INFORMATION PAPER

02 July 2014

SUBJECT: High Reliability Organization

1. **Purpose.** Provide the OneStaff a summary of the concept of a High Reliability Organization (HRO) and provide recommendations for furthering OneStaff understanding of the topic.

2. **Overview.**

a. A High Reliability Organization (HRO) is an organization that has succeeded in avoiding catastrophes in an environment where normal accidents can be expected due to risk factors and complexity.

b. HRO derives from high-reliability science which is the study of organizations in industries like commercial aviation and nuclear power that operate under hazardous conditions while maintaining safety levels that are far better than those of health care. Adapting and applying the lessons of this science to health care offer the promise of enabling hospitals to reach levels of quality and safety that are comparable to those of the best high-reliability organizations.

c. There are five characteristics of High Reliability Organizations that have been identified according to Weike and Sutcliffe as responsible for the "mindfulness" that keeps them working well when facing unexpected situations.

1. Preoccupation with failure: Everyone is focused on errors and near-misses, learning from them and figuring out how to prevent them from happening again. Attention to detail is crucial. Finding and fixing problems is everyone's responsibility and is encouraged and supported by leadership.

2. Reluctance to simplify interpretations: Requires constantly asking the "why" question and inviting others with diverse experience to express their opinions. The belief is that the more you're immersed in something, the harder it is for you to objectively observe and question things that need questioning. Leverage new thinking to get the right answer!

3. Sensitivity to operations: An ongoing concern with the unexpected. Hallmark actions include closing loopholes in processes where there is potential for patient harm, maintaining situational awareness, developing teams that speak up and paying attention to the frontline – which in hospitals is primarily nurses, patient care attendants, techs and support staff.

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4. Commitment to resilience: The concept that things will go wrong that we can't predict; mistakes will be made, and we will get into trouble. But we will quickly identify issues and have structures in place so we can immediately respond and minimize the harm. Errors won't disable us.

5. Deference to expertise: Finding and using experts for the given problem in the given time. More specifically, it means recognizing that those closest to the frontline are the experts and empowering them to make decisions when a critical issue arises results in quicker mitigation of harm.

d. HRO training and education is typically "binned" into the categories of leadership, safety, and process improvement.

3. Sources.

a. *High-Reliability Health Care: Getting There from Here*, Chassin, Mark R. and Loeb, Jerod M., The Joint Commission, available at www.jointcommission.org/assets/1/6/Chassin_and_Loeb_0913_final.pdf

b. *Managing the unexpected: Assuring high performance in an age of complexity*, Weick, Karl E. and Sutcliffe, Kathleen M., University of Michigan business school management series, abstract available at <http://psycnet.apa.org/psycinfo/2001-18334-000>

c. <http://www.beckershospitalreview.com/hospital-management-administration/5-traits-of-high-reliability-organizations-how-to-hardwire-each-in-your-organization.html>

4. Recommendations.

a. Encourage OneStaff personnel to read the Chassin and Loeb article as part of individual or organizational development .

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