

p-ISSN: 2788-4961

e-ISSN: 2788-418X

GIIDR

GLOBAL IMMUNOLOGICAL & INFECTIOUS DISEASES REVIEW

Volum X, ISSUE I WINTER (MARCH-2025)

DOI(Journal): 10.31703/giidr

DOI(Volume): 10.31703/giidr.2025(X)

DOI(Issue): 10.31703/giidr.2025(X.I)

Article Title

Lean Healthcare: Reducing Patient Wait Times via Toyota Production System Principles

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Keywords: Lean Healthcare, Toyota Production System, Patient Flow, Value Stream Mapping, Process Redesign

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Pages: 1-6

DOI: 10.31703/giidr.2025(X-I).01

DOI link: [https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/giidr.2025\(X-I\).01](https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/giidr.2025(X-I).01)

Article link: <http://www.giidrjournal.com/article/lean-healthcare-reducing-patient-wait-times-via-toyota-production-system-principles>

Full-text Link: <https://giidrjournal.com/article/lean-healthcare-reducing-patient-wait-times-via-toyota-production-system-principles>

PDF link: <https://www.giidrjournal.com/jadmin/Auther/31rvloA2.pdf>

Global Immunological & Infectious Diseases Review

p-ISSN: [2788-4961](https://doi.org/10.31703/giidr.2025(X-I).01) e-ISSN: [2788-418X](https://doi.org/10.31703/giidr.2025(X-I).01)

DOI (journal): 10.31703/giidr

Volume: X (2025)

DOI (volume): 10.31703/giidr.2025(X)

Issue: I-Winter (March-2025)

DOI(Issue): 10.31703/giidr.2025(X-I)

Home Page

www.giidrjournal.com

Volume: X (2025)

<https://www.giidrjournal.com/Current-issues>

Issue: I-Winter (March-2025)

<https://www.giidrjournal.com/Current-issues/10/1/2025>

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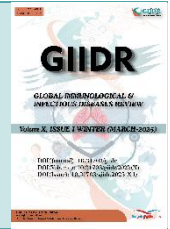
Citing this Article

01	Lean Healthcare: Reducing Patient Wait Times via Toyota Production System Principles		
Authors	Syed Saddam Ali Shah	DOI	10.31703/giidr.2025(X-1).01
		Pages	1-6
		Year	2025
		Volume	X
		Issue	1

Referencing & Citing Styles

APA	Shah, S. S. A. (2025). Lean Healthcare: Reducing Patient Wait Times via Toyota Production System Principles. <i>Global Immunological & Infectious Diseases Review</i> , X(1), 1-6. https://doi.org/10.31703/giidr.2025(X-1).01
CHICAGO	Shah, Syed Saddam Ali. 2025. "Lean Healthcare: Reducing Patient Wait Times via Toyota Production System Principles." <i>Global Immunological & Infectious Diseases Review</i> X (1):1-6. doi: 10.31703/giidr.2025(X-1).01.
HARVARD	SHAH, S. S. A. 2025. Lean Healthcare: Reducing Patient Wait Times via Toyota Production System Principles. <i>Global Immunological & Infectious Diseases Review</i> X, 1-6.
MHRA	Shah, Syed Saddam Ali. 2025. 'Lean Healthcare: Reducing Patient Wait Times via Toyota Production System Principles', <i>Global Immunological & Infectious Diseases Review</i> , X: 1-6.
MLA	Shah, Syed Saddam Ali. "Lean Healthcare: Reducing Patient Wait Times Via Toyota Production System Principles." <i>Global Immunological & Infectious Diseases Review</i> X.1 (2025): 1-6. Print.
OXFORD	Shah, Syed Saddam Ali (2025), 'Lean Healthcare: Reducing Patient Wait Times via Toyota Production System Principles', <i>Global Immunological & Infectious Diseases Review</i> X(1), 1-6.
TURABIAN	Shah, Syed Saddam Ali. "Lean Healthcare: Reducing Patient Wait Times Via Toyota Production System Principles." <i>Global Immunological & Infectious Diseases Review</i> X, no. 1 (2025): 1-6. https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/giidr.2025(X-1).01 .





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Introduction

Long wait times among patients also come to the forefront as a significant issue in healthcare provision that has resulted in staff burnout and increased operational inefficiencies, as well as patient dissatisfaction (Khan, [2022](#)). In an area where immediate attention may be a big factor, delays lead to

mistrust and the general quality of services. The importance of addressing wait times is not only on how the patient will feel but also in concerns of how the healthcare provider can manage its resources in an effective manner, and the effects of the clinical outcome, and the effect of financial performance directly. As the system needs to be improved, one of



the options that can be discussed is researching the approaches to the Lean methodologies of the Toyota Production System (TPS).

Application of Lean concepts in healthcare has proved the tremendous possibilities it holds in making operations lean and waste free although its application is still very rare. TPS was started in the manufacturing sphere and aims at the removal of the non-value-related processes and the creation of the culture of respect and constant improvement (Khan, [2022](#)). The efficacy of Lean in healthcare can be seen in studies carried out at Hotel-Dieu Grace Hospital that were able to cut down the time taken to get patients registered in the emergency department (ED) to the physician by 30% and Goshen Health that were able to reduce their time of operation room (OR) turnover by half. These interventions showcase the dramatic impact of the Lean methodologies on efficiency and quality of the patient care, when utilized with the proper adjustments.

Irrespective of these success stories, gaps in the literature still exist. Even though there are isolated case studies of the advantages of Lean, there are few and far between comprehensive structures of scalable and sustainable implementation. Moreover, the cultural resistance related problems in healthcare institutions, the sustainability of Lean changes, and adaptation of Lean tools to the healthcare setting have not received proper attention. The majority of existing research relies on the results, which do not extend much further on the mechanisms of inculcating the Lean culture into the intricate healthcare frameworks.

The paper will address these gaps by uniting the empirical findings of different case studies and developing a coherent framework of Lean application in the field of healthcare and proposing strategies to eliminate cultural and operation obstacles. In this way, it gives practice-related data about the need to develop more effective processes, reduce the number of patient waiting times, and establish cultures of continuous improvement among healthcare leaders.

Literature Review

There are numerous studies indicating the positive aspects of the use of Lean in Healthcare. Lean refers to a method of enhancing value to the patient by getting rid of waste in the process which includes needless movement, waiting, overprocessing, and unnecessary inventory. It is also concentrated on the idea of value-stream mapping that allows healthcare facilities to locate the bottlenecks and develop a streamlined

workflow. Lean intercession at Hotel-Dieu Grace Hospital led to a 30 percent decrease in the time of waiting of patients through the re-engineering of the registration and triage process. Likewise, Goshen Health discovered that after redesigning the Lean processes they had to spend less time on turnover in the OR: instead of 30, it was 15. Lean also focuses on the management of inventory through just-in-time to ensure that there is minimal clutter and resources are available when required hence making delays minimal.

Although these have been successes, there has been limitations in the application of the Lean healthcare in literature which are: A lot of studies concentrate on the outcomes and fail to present a replicable framework that healthcare organizations can use to incorporate in their unique settings. Furthermore, studies often overlook the human aspect associated with the Lean success which include the staff involvement, the leadership dedication and the change of culture. Long-term benefits are an even more confusing term due to the lack of longitudinal studies to quantify the sustainability of Lean initiatives.

Lean healthcare has become a process-sustaining methodology that transforms the concepts of the Toyota Production System (TPS) to waste elimination and higher patient value. Lean focuses on non-value add functions that are prevalent in the clinical pathways, such as waiting, needless motion, rework, overstocking, and ineffective handoffs (Womack and Jones, [2003](#)). One such central tool is the value-stream mapping employed to enable the team to map out the entire patient experience, spot the bottlenecks, and redesign the flow to eliminate delays (Toussaint and Berry, [2013](#)). Systematic review evidence demonstrates that patient-flow outcomes have been steadily improved: in a variety of settings, Lean interventions tend to decrease the length of stay and waiting time to be attended to by a clinician (Tlapa et al., [2020](#)). Likewise, inpatient-oriented evidence suggests that Lean tends to optimize efficiency and flow with no subsequent rise in readmissions to support its possible role in improving quality as well as productivity (Zepeda-Lugo et al., [2020](#)).

Lean has been implemented in emergency care in the triage, registration, diagnostic sequencing, and staffing coordination. Nonetheless, the reviews warn that the results are not uniform since implementations usually focus on the tools, but not the construction of the system-wide Lean culture (Holden, [2011](#)). This objection can be connected with more general arguments that Lean in healthcare can yield local

improvements in the absence of systematic change, which restricts the possibility of replicating the results across departments and hospitals (Radnor et al., 2012). It is also becoming common in the literature that sustainable Lean needs leadership dedication, personnel capacity-building, and routine systems of continuous improvement (Kaizen), as opposed to individual quick-fix initiatives (Toussaint and Berry, 2013).

Even though there is substantial evidence of short-term efficiency gains, gaps do exist. Most of the studies record improvements in their outcomes but they give minimal information on the implementation fidelity, situational issues or mechanisms which underpin the success or failure of the interventions (Radnor et al., 2012). There is also limited longitudinal evidence; not many studies consider whether the decrease in waiting time and improvement in the flow also occur once the initial project assistance is over (Holden, 2011; Tlapa et al., 2020). In general, the literature confirms Lean as a powerful method to cut down delays, but it requires more comprehensive, transferable models, which incorporate technical solutions with a culture change to maintain the improvement in the long term.

Research Gaps

The gaps in the current research are the absence of:

1. A streamlined framework to adopt and use the Lean practices in various healthcare settings on a long-term basis.
2. Systematic reviews of cultural and behavioral impediments banning successful Lean implementation among medical practitioners.
3. The persistence and longevity of Lean intervention performance changes over time.
4. Evidence-based interventions to integrate the Lean methodologies with patient centered care values and staff morale and professional well-being.

These loopholes point to the necessity of an integrated strategy, which should entail the application of Lean tools and the optimization of organizational culture to achieve sustainable and patient-centric healthcare enhancement.

This is a more fanciful and scholarly polished version, without making the content too long or too complicated:

Significance of the Study

The paper will fill the research gaps highlighted by offering a systematic and scalable model of implementation of Lean methodologies in healthcare

facilities. It has the following contributions based on the input of the theory and on empirical case studies:

1. A more gradual implementation process such as leadership buy-in, staff capacity building, and gradual scale up, piloting and systematic.
2. Plans to develop an atmosphere of continuous improvement (Kaizen) and actively address resistance to organization change.
3. How well the Lean principles can be applied to the objectives of patient-centered care and enhance efficiencies without sacrificing the patient experience.
4. A performance measure set that will seek to measure both short-term outcomes and long-term sustainability of Lean interventions.

This paper offers a comprehensive and practical roadmap to change in the search of sustainable Lean change by healthcare leaders on integrating technical process enhancements, cultural and behavioral factors.

Significance to Business and Industry

Healthcare is an important pillar of any society, not only as far as the health of the population is concerned but economic performance and social order. Long waits among patients have been an old issue across the globe in healthcare systems, and the subsequent poor customer satisfaction rates, inefficiencies in operations, staff burnout, and loss of quality of care. The consequences of such inefficiencies in the business and industry environment will be the rise in the cost of doing business, wastes of resources, loss of confidence among the population and loss of revenue potential. Therefore, streamlining the healthcare system is more a financial than a medical necessity.

The Toyota Production System (TPS) and the Lean methodologies are not new to the business world and are revolutionary in the way they have been used to enhance efficiency, reduce wastes and create maximum value. Application of these to the sphere of healthcare offers a chance to revolutionize the healthcare sector, as the process of delivering care will be much quicker, safer, and more economical. Lean healthcare is needed to create a balance between operational efficiency and patient-centered care and ensure that hospitals, clinics, and the whole network of healthcare institutions are competitive, sustainable, and socially responsible.

Lean Healthcare Implementation Framework.

1. Leadership and Vision establishment: Leadership that initiates any Lean transformation initiative

must begin with leadership that conveys the importance of Lean transformation; devotes resources to facilitate it; and sets examples (Khan, [2024](#)).

2. **Training and Staff Engagement** Detailed training on the concepts of Lean will ensure that all levels of the staff, can detect waste and make recommendations on how to improve the situation. TPS philosophy focuses on respecting people, which is a component of buy-in.
3. **Pilot Projects:** Conducting Lean in a small scale means one gets the opportunity to learn in an iterative manner and one gets confidence before doing it at a greater scale.
4. **Value-Stream Mapping:** The patient flow maps the bottlenecks and wastes that identify the flow of the process which offers an excellent road map in making any improvements to the process.
5. **Kaizen Events:** Consistent, intensive improvement workshops, to assist in generating momentum and the strength of embracing group problem-solving.
6. **Standardization and Scalability:** Interventions which work are standardized and implemented across units in a way that can bring consistency and wider effects.
7. **Sustainability and Continuous Improvement:** Production of feedback loops, performance measurements and recognition programs to assist in sustaining the Lean practices and a culture of continuous improvement.

Theoretical Importance

From a theoretical standpoint, Lean principles applied to healthcare problems the traditional service operations models, which often accept high levels of inefficiency as "necessary evils." Lean suggests that healthcare is similar to manufacturing in terms of value streams which can be mapped, measured, and optimized. By concentrating on value added activities and systematically eliminating waste (called "muda" in TPS), healthcare operations can be transformed into continuous flow systems instead of a series of service station stop-offs.

Theoretically, Lean healthcare builds upon a number of critical concepts:

Systems Thinking: Thinking of healthcare as a series of processes that are interrelated.

- **The use of Kaizen (Continuous Improvement):** Integrating an organizational culture of incremental but relentless improvement.

- **Jidoka (Automation with a Human Touch):** Empowering the frontline workers to stop and correct problems at the source.
- **Just-In-Time (JIT):** Just-in-time production of services, which helps avoid bottlenecks.

Considerable Attention in Literature

The academic and practitioner literature has given much attention to Lean healthcare during the past two decades. There are numerous case studies, empirical analyses and theoretical explorations:

Toussaint, S. and Berry, B. ([2013](#)) How ThedaCare used Lean to improve patient safety and operational efficiency.

Lean: A review of existing evidence and future research directions. - Mazzocato et al, [2010](#), International Journal of Healthcare Services, 40:488-497. - This study was a systematic review that noted the potential of Lean in healthcare, but cautioned about the need for cultural adaptation.

This literature review by Kim et al. ([2006](#)) showed that Lean significantly lowered the emergency department (ED) length of stay.

Joosten, Bongers, and Janssen ([2009](#)) found the Lean improved patient flow, reduced lead times, and improved staff satisfaction.

Radnor, Holweg, & Waring ([2012](#)) Transferability of Lean from manufacturing to healthcare, Get it right, don't miss out - Pitfalls and success factors.

The following are some of the arguments on Lean in healthcare; - Poksinska ([2010](#)) for example argued that Lean's success in healthcare is dependent on strong leadership and commitment to change management.

Theoretical Implications

There are a few theoretical implications of Lean to the health care:

Cross-sector Adaptability: Refers to the fact that the principles of process optimization are universal.

- **Organizational Behavior:** Reminds about the importance of organization culture, leadership, and frontline engagement in the success of operations.
- **Value-Based Healthcare:** Strengthens the transition away of volume-based care models to value-based care models.
- **Systems Re-engineering:** This implies that healthcare systems can be reengineered, not improved bit by bit.

Hypothesis: The application of Lean methodologies in accordance with the principles of the Toyota

Production System is a key factor that won't cause significant changes in the quality of care, but can drastically shorten the waiting time of patients and operational expenses of the healthcare systems.

Findings and Literature Support.

Several data prove this supposition:

Case Study of Hôtel-Dieu Grace Hospital: As Lean was introduced, the registration-to-physician time had been cut by 30 percent that is why the actual improvement of efficiency was proved (Toussaint and Berry, 2013).

OR Improvement at Goshen Health: OR turnover time improved by half (30 minutes to 15 minutes) and led to an operating room which was using more resources and more flexible in schedules (Kim et al., 2006).

Virginia Mason medical Center: The adoption of Lean led to radical reductions in the count of medication errors and surgical site infections or reduction in the cost of operations (Joosten et al., 2009).

Also: NHS Scotland: Lean implementation in some hospitals led to a decrease in patient throughput times, as well as staff morale (Radnor et al., 2012).

And, the example of Park Nicollet Health Services: with the help of Lean, the waiting time in the appointments decreased by 40 percent and patient satisfaction rates were upgraded.

The common thread in these examples is that Lean is not only giving the structured tools of analysis of problems (e.g., value stream mapping, root cause analysis) and the ability of employees to innovate in the workplace, but also a feedback loop whereby system performance is constantly improved.

Also, the focus of Lean on the subject of respect towards people is reminiscent of patient-centered care ideologies, making it not only an operational solution but also a paradigm change.

Conclusion

The given paper also discussed the serious problem of patient wait times in healthcare facilities and the way how the Lean healthcare based on the principles of the Toyota Production System could be considered a great solution to this problem. We showed that this is an important issue to the business and industry because of its operational, economical and societal implications. In theory, Lean provides a path to recreate healthcare service delivery via systems thinking, constant improvement and removing wastes.

The literature review contributed to the confirmation of the strong academic and empirical interest in the use of this approach, and the results were similar, which is that Lean may assist in reducing wait times, minimizing costs, and improving quality. The presence of numerous case studies and real outcomes supported our assumption that Lean methodologies would help to remake the health care efficiency.

Lean healthcare is efficient and offers a cultural change of healthcare to patient-centered care, accountability, and continuous improvement as a sustainable, scalable model to healthcare systems worldwide.

The shortening of patient wait time is also essential in enhancing quality of healthcare, patient satisfaction and health operations. The Toyota Production System has lean methods which offer a proven but poorly utilized means to this end. Although case study-based experimentation of extraordinary successes has been documented in isolated cases, there remains a necessity of the framework of Lean transformation that can be used to drive reforms in healthcare institutions. This need is met in this paper.

summing up the best practices and suggest a general cultural sensitive strategy of the implementation of the Lean healthcare. It bridges the existing gaps between the theory and practice, and thus, provides the way to sustainable patient-centred excellence across the healthcare systems worldwide.

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