

Greenbelt Profile: Jill Burke

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Jill Burke is the Athena software support and Clinical Integration Coordinator for the Physician Group at Southwestern Vermont Medical Center (SVMC). She recently completed a Greenbelt project designed to improve the incoming call system at the Pownal Family Health Center by decreasing the rate of abandoned calls (patients who called and were not able to talk directly with a staff member).

Jill graduated with a degree in Business Administration and worked for Killington as an Administrative Assistant before deciding to move back to Bennington. She was offered a position at SVMC with no medical experience. "I am very happy they took a chance on me," says Jill. Her first position at SVMC was in the Billing Department as a Patient Financial Advisor. She was subsequently promoted to help build a scheduling module for the hospital Meditech program, as well as to implement a consolidated Scheduling/Billing Athena platform for the Physician Group Practice. This led her to her current position in Athena software support and as the Clinical Integration Coordinator for SVMC's Physician Group. Jill has now been at SVMC for 16 years.

Jill became interested in process improvement work during her time as an office manager, where she identified several areas in need of process improvement. Her director suggested that she enroll in the Greenbelt Program through the Value Institute Learning Center, and Jill immediately said yes. "I was very excited! I love working at SVMC and want to make it a better place for our patients and our staff," Jill says. Although Jill didn't have any prior experience with Yellowbelt training, she enjoyed jumping right into the Greenbelt class. She says she especially appreciated the emphasis on teamwork and the hands-on exercises. Jill appreciated that the Greenbelt faculty, "were very knowledgeable and did a great job explaining the process."

When deciding on her first Greenbelt project, Jill says, "I asked my director what she felt would be the best use of my time given the many projects that needed attention. I tend to gravitate toward Revenue Cycle projects since that is my background. My coach and director, however, thought it would be a great idea for me to try something I had limited knowledge of in order to experience the DMAIC process without forming early assumptions." With that in

mind, Jill decided to focus on the high call abandon rate for the Pownal Family Health Center office. Jill and her team pinpointed a couple of important ways to reduce the rate of abandoned calls and, in turn, increase both patient and staff satisfaction. The first was to utilize a single phone operator with overflow technology and the second was to reassign work responsibilities. This resulted in a significant improvement – especially for the nurse triage line which had the highest rate of abandoned calls. At the start of the project, the call abandon rate was at 90%, after implementing these changes the call abandon rate has dropped to 60% according to the latest statistics.

Reflecting on the successes and difficulties of the project, Jill says, "The group we created for the project had great knowledge and representation of the issues at hand. Everyone was engaged and happy to help. We did have some unexpected changes to the phone system and limited reporting functions that proved to be difficult when trying to capture consistent data." Jill also credits the success of the project to her coach, Alex Heintz, saying that she was very helpful in guiding her through the process. Jill's coach Alex says, "Jill was a pleasure to coach because she's affa-

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ble, organized and highly analytical. She understood the methods and tools and how to apply them, and she also had the drive to get the project done. Jill's success with her team underscores the importance of making sure Greenbelt candidates have the skills and the motivation to complete the work – especially when there are Yellowbelts on the team who are also working towards certification. This was a win-win for everyone involved!"

Looking forward, Jill says, "We have several projects on the horizon where I will be able to utilize the DMAIC process and experience from my training. As the Athena software support person, I am frequently using the techniques when problems arise. The most useful tool [from the Greenbelt training] for me is the training manual. I have referenced the book several times in my current position to help me sort through my thoughts and dilemmas. WWDD - - What Would DMAIC Do?" In terms of future projects, Jill says she looks forward to possibly taking on the standardization of physician templates and improved patient portal engagement.