

Greenbelt Profile: Ashley Luurtsema and Gretchen Rutherford

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When we think about spreading process improvement methodology throughout an organization, one of the best ways to do this is to train leaders who support this work and want to see their staff committed to improvement work. Currently, the two Senior Practice Managers in the Department of Surgery are both Greenbelt Certified and

strong proponents of continuous improvement in their sections. Ashley Luurtsema, the Senior Manager of Dermatology, Plastic Surgery, Wound Care, and Thoracic Surgery was trained in early 2013, and Gretchen Rutherford, the Senior Practice Manager for General Surgery was trained in 2015.

Ashley started her career at Dartmouth-Hitchcock in the purchasing department where she was first exposed to process improvement work. Here she quickly started to learn the language and concepts of process improvement, with one of her early assignments being to complete a 5S activity for the contract station in Purchasing. Ashley started her tenure in the Department of Surgery with Dermatology in 2010. Since then, she has collaborated with the Section Chief, Dr. Shane Chapman, to create an efficient clinical model that has been visited by Dermatology leaders from John Hopkins, Columbia, and others as a best practice model. A similar model and goal of continuous improvement has also been adopted by Plastic Surgery.

Gretchen came to Dartmouth-Hitchcock in 2012 from an analyst role at Microsoft. She initially started in Human Resources working as an analyst and a project manager, before transferring to a role as the Practice Manager of Vascular Surgery in the Heart and Vascular Center. She worked in that role for two years, where she was trained as a greenbelt and led her first DMAIC project. Eventually, moving into her current role in the Department of Surgery, she is now in a position to help support others on their process improvement journeys.

Both Ashley and Gretchen are leaders who are committed to continuous improvement in their sections, something that greatly benefits the Department of Surgery overall. Many staff in Dermatology and Plastic Surgery have attended Yellowbelt training including providers, nurses, residents, scribes, and secretaries. Most recently, Dermatology and Vascular Surgery both sent their Operation's Man-

agers to Greenbelt training and both of those students have led their first improvement projects, enabling other staff to achieve their Yellowbelt Certification.

Committed leaders are key to the success of improvement work, but there are many other important areas of support to highlight. Ashley's first greenbelt project focused on eliminating waste to create more efficiencies in the Dermatology clinic. They ended up zeroing in on the number of times that the nurses went in and out of exam rooms, either to get supplies, to clean a room, or to get equipment. This was creating a bottleneck where providers were waiting for patients to be fully prepped before they could see them. Ashley highlights the commitment and support of the entire clinic team to the project's success. "The actual clinical team that assisted me with time studies, surveying, etc. was the biggest help. They were also upbeat and onboard with changes as we went along. Not all of them "stuck" but they were willing to try anything," Ashley says.

Gretchen also credits her project team and members of her section who helped with various pieces of the work, "Every role was key." Gretchen's project focused on cost efficiencies for a minimally invasive vascular procedure and recognizes that a collaboration with others outside of her department was also important to her success. "The lynchpin was the cost accounting piece. We learned how much things cost during various stages of the care path which helped us decide where to focus."

Now, as administrative leaders in the Department of Surgery, both Gretchen and Ashley have ensured that continuous improvement is a part of their everyday work. "I really consider this to be part of my standard work, and one of the top priorities of my role. I feel like I am constantly completing process improvement work in an

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unofficial manner and can think of numerous projects we've completed over the past several years to improve either efficiencies, patient satisfaction, or staff satisfaction. In order to keep up with the constant patient demand and pressures, it is important to always be looking at different ways to do our work, otherwise staff will quickly burn out and not be able to keep up, and patients will feel it. We want our work to be rewarding and enjoyable, and to keep 'working harder, not smarter' is not the route to get there," say Ashley. Gretchen agrees, "Process improvement helps with operations because it surfaces issues and barriers at a system level." Having leaders who truly understand that process improvement work makes operations easier and more efficient is something that greatly benefits the Department of Surgery.