

# Portfolio examples: Healthcare

Clinical quality and patient safety



## Why is clinical quality & patient safety important?

There are key factors driving the demand for higher standards in healthcare worldwide.

- An aging population, with greater emphasis on longer stays and more intensive procedures.
- More sophisticated technology and procedures, which bring opportunity but also the potential for 'institutional errors' and oversights.
- Increased regulatory scrutiny, from health departments and political watchdogs.
- Expectations of safety and quality are rising continually with higher standards of living.
- Healthcareers are increasingly limited by financial constraints and privatisation forces.
- Other industries have improved process reliability and healthcare offers similar potential.

## The Australian case for higher healthcare standards

The Auditor General in Victoria has published a report (in March 2005) outlining opportunities for healthcare providers.

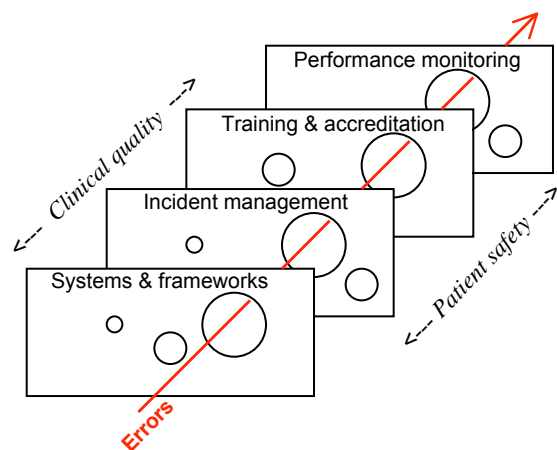
- Healthcare risk management systems and processes are not as consistent as required.
- The management of clinical risks is unsystematic in some cases, as incidents and risk data are not collected and used to judge performance.
- The clinical risk management effort is not always integrated with the wider organisational (e.g. financial) risk management system.
- The importance of human error is often misunderstood as a factor solely within the control of individuals, rather than being largely dependent on work design.

In summary, the Auditor General's findings suggest that exhorting people to 'be more careful' has reached its limit, and more systematic methods for work process standards should be considered.

Increasingly the focus is on the interdependence of personnel, procedures, equipment and management systems to provide error-proof and effective processes.

## The 'Swiss cheese' model of reliability threats

The diagram below illustrates how the environment in which work happens is the key to process efficiency and reliability.



## Key opportunities

Risk Management is at the vanguard of transferring proven systems, tools and techniques from various process industries to healthcare. Principles focused on 'lean' work processes, where errors are designed out and quality is built into the culture of day-to-day operational standards, are well known in other industries that operate on wafer-thin margins. Our experience with risk management, error control and human factors training to operating and production teams benefits organisations such as:

- The pathology unit of a major NSW hospital.
- Palliative care in a regional area.
- Utility supply reliability in one of Melbourne's busiest operating theatres.