Problem identification

Problem identification is the first and foundational step in any quality improvement, research, or clinical decision-making process. It involves recognizing, defining, and articulating a specific issue or gap in performance, outcomes, or processes that requires change or improvement.

In the Context of Healthcare:

Problem identification means clearly describing a clinical, operational, or systemic issue that:

Negatively affects patient care, safety, or efficiency

It is based on evidence (e.g., audit data, patient outcomes, staff feedback)

Is measurable and amenable to intervention

Key Components:

Observation of a gap between current and desired performance.

Data collection to confirm the problem (e.g., rates of infection, delays in ICU admissions).

Definition of scope and impact — who is affected, how often, and how severely.

Statement of the problem — phrased, focused, and actionable.

Example:

"Patients admitted to the ICU during night shifts consistently report lower satisfaction scores, suggesting a problem with communication and orientation during off-hours."

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