Root Cause Analysis Utilizing the Five Whys
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**Background**
The Five Whys is a simple science of improvement methodology that identifies and addresses the root cause (underlying reason) of a problem. Humans experience errors, but it was the system in which they were interacting that was the impetus for the error. Addressing the root cause of a problem, and not just the issues at hand, promotes a more effective and sustainable solution. Other root cause analysis (RCA) tools exist, often too advanced for widespread use by most team members.

**Steps of Five Whys:**
1. Understand the event - investigate the event, identify the contributing facts and factors.
2. Develop the Problem Statement.
3. Ask “why” the problem happened, directly relating to the problem statement.
4. Determine if the response is the root cause or a causal factor.
5. Ask “why” the previous causal factor happened until the root cause has been identified. Each “why” should directly relate to the previous “why”.

**Aim**
Increase organizational knowledge and utilization of the Five Whys tool for Root Cause Analysis.

**Actions Taken**
VCU Medical Center implemented actions to increase team member knowledge and utilization of the Five Whys tool with the goal of “digging deeper” to identify and address root causes of undesirable events.
- Identified key groups and processes for using Five Whys.
- Developed Five Whys tools and education.
- Developed competencies for lead analysts and coaches.
- Provided educational opportunities — educational sessions and just-in-time training during RCAs.

**Actions Taken**
Five Whys awareness and utilization increased across the organization.
- Over 400 team members educated.
- Ongoing utilization for event analysis:
  - Safety events.
  - QAPI & Quality Improvement efforts and teams.
  - Dedicated RCA tool for TJC Preventive Analyses to address survey findings.
- Course offering in our Quality Academy.
- Promotes team members to ask “why” a problem happened and not address only the most apparent issue.

**Lessons Learned**
- Five Whys is a simple tool for performing root cause analysis, however it is not so simple to perform.
- Ongoing resources (lead analysts, coaching, education) are beneficial support of analyses and teams.
- Effective corrective actions are necessary to address the root cause of the problem.
- Performance must monitored to ensure sustained compliance.

To validate the root cause(s), ask: 1) If you removed this cause, would this event/problem have been prevented? & 2) Can we take specific actions to fix this cause?