

Quality and Safety Series

The 5 Whys

OBJECTIVES

A close-up photograph of a person's hand, wearing a dark suit jacket and a white shirt cuff, pointing towards the word 'OBJECTIVES' in the title. The hand is positioned on the right side of the slide, with the index finger pointing towards the 'V' in 'OBJECTIVES'.

- Describe the elements of the 5 Whys tool.
- Identify reasons for using the 5 Whys tool.
- Review the process for using the 5 Whys tool.

What Is the 5 Whys Tool?



- Developed as part of Lean.
- Used in performance improvement.
 - Part of “*define*” phase for DMAIC¹
 - Part of “*plan*” phase for PDSA²
- Uses iterative interrogative technique.
- Explores cause-and-effect relationships.
- Used in root cause analysis.
- Used in a group.
 - Persons directly involved in the event
- Constructed so each answer forms the foundation of the next question.

Getting Started

1. Form a team.
 - Work with each person who has direct knowledge of the event or process.
2. Define the problem.
 - Create a clear problem statement.
 - Define the scope.
3. Ask the question.
 - Answers should be based in fact, not emotion.
 - If possible, back up answers with data, policies, procedures, etc.



Important!

- Not a punitive process
- Part of “just culture”

- Not a blame game
- Set process boundaries



TIP: Instead of asking “why?” ask
“How could this have happened?”

The 5 Whys

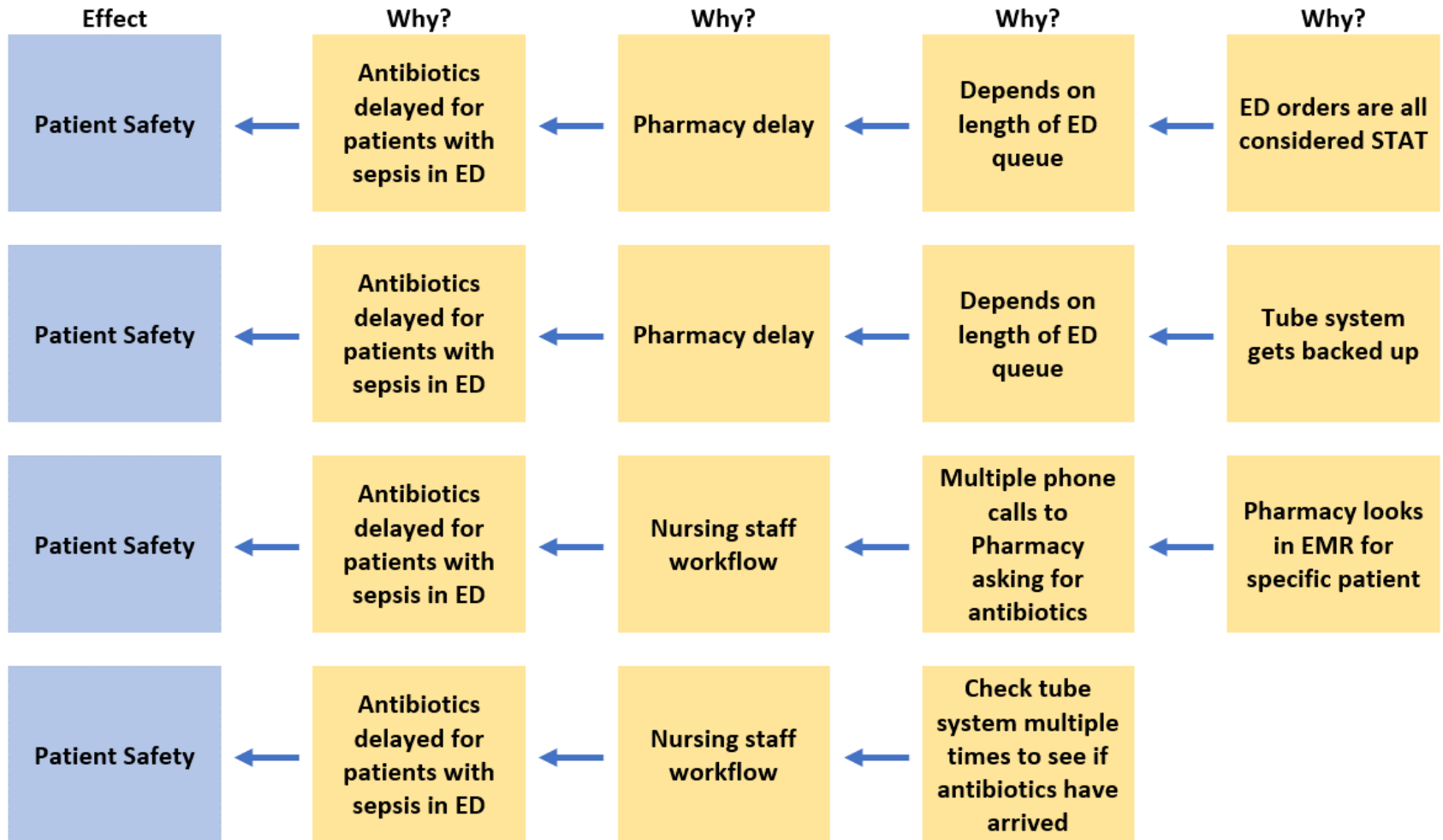
Begin by identifying a specific problem.

1. Then ask, “Why did this happen?”
2. Then ask, “Why did this happen?”
3. Then ask, “Why did this happen?”
4. Then ask, “Why did this happen?”
5. Then ask, “Why did this happen?”

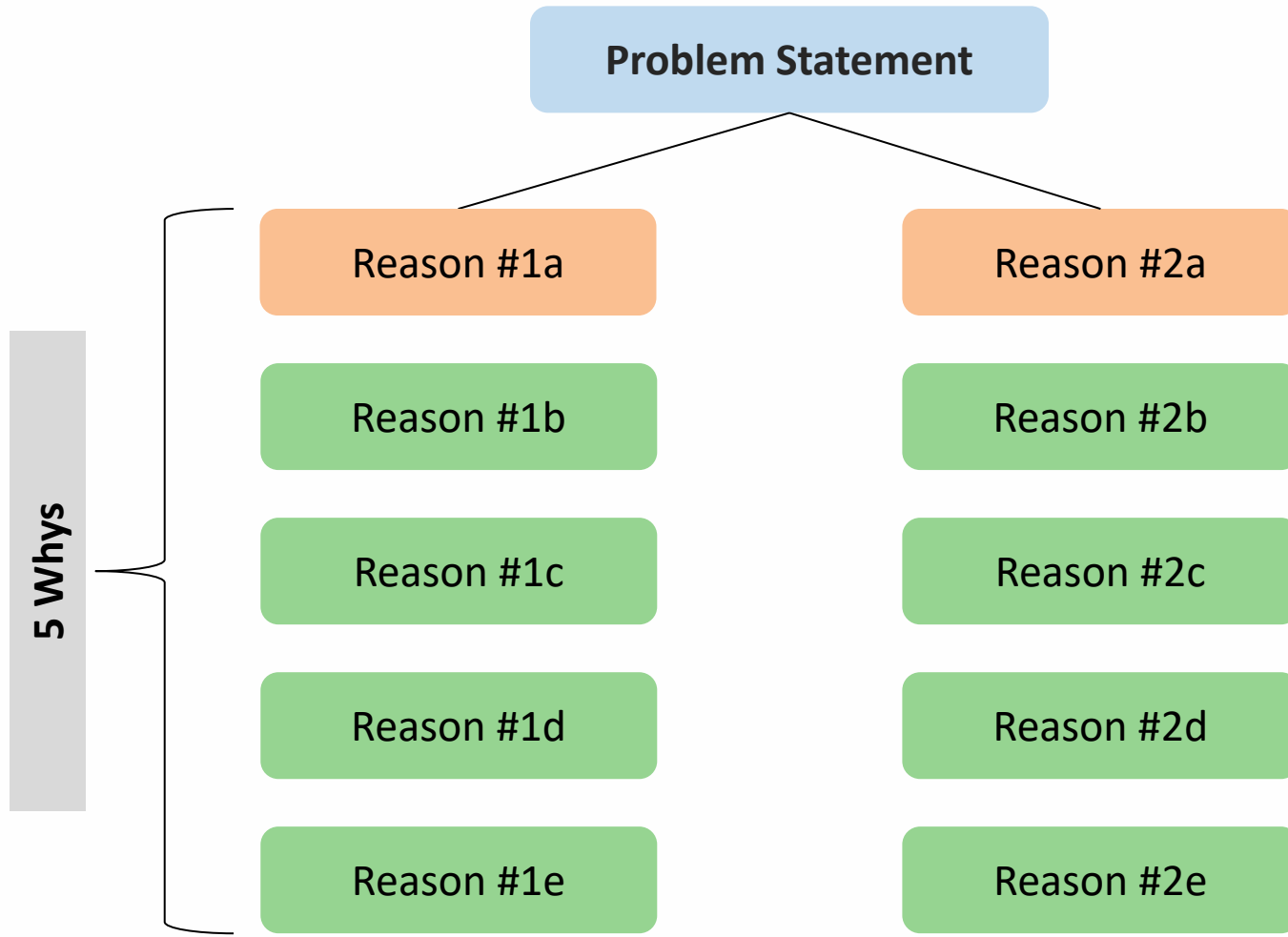


Antibiotic for Patients With Sepsis

Example of 5 Whys



More Than 1 Reason?



The 5 Whys Template

The 5 Whys

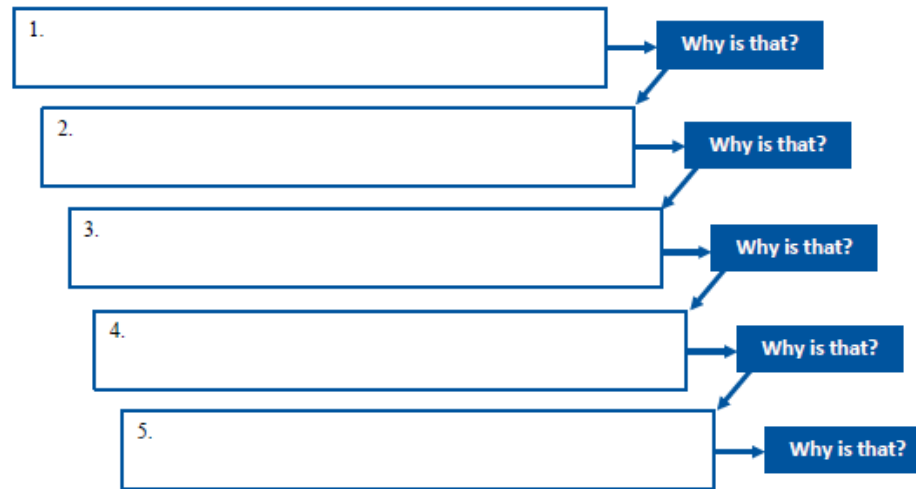
The 5 Whys tool aids in the identification of the root cause of a problem. Begin by identifying a specific problem, and ask why this is occurring. Continue to ask “Why?” to identify causes until the underlying cause is determined. Each “Why?” should build from the previous answer. There is nothing magical about the number five; sometimes a root cause may be reached after asking “Why?” just a few times; other times deeper questioning is needed.

Steps

1. Define a problem; be specific.
2. Ask why this problem occurs and list the reasons in Box 1.
3. Select one of the reasons from Box 1 and ask, “Why does this occur?” List the reasons in Box 2.
4. Continue this process of questioning until you have uncovered the root cause of the identified problem. If there are no identifiable answers or solutions, address a different reason.

The problem: _____

Why does this occur?



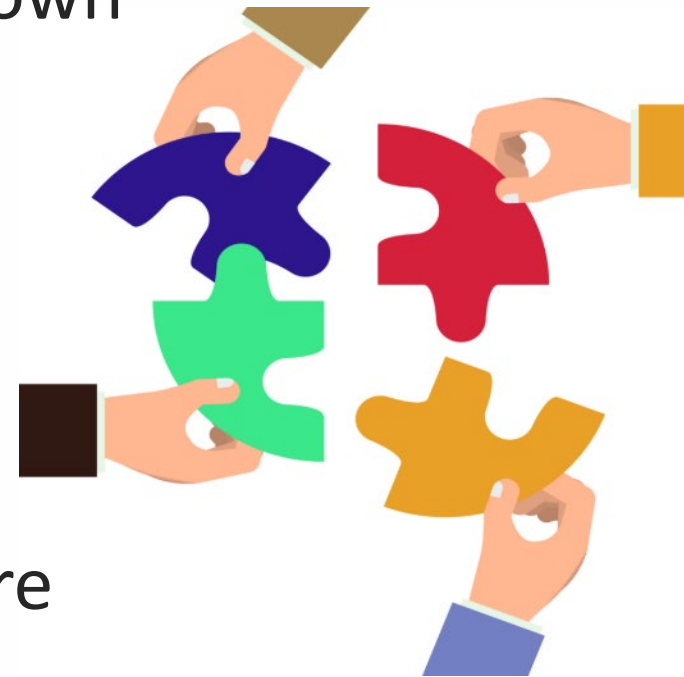
Next Steps

- Team reaches consensus.
- Root cause identified.
- Identify additional support for root cause.
- Support with data.
- Continue with performance improvement cycle.



Key Take-Aways

- 5 Whys is a tool used in the *define* or *plan* phase of performance improvement models.
- The 5 Whys tool is used to drill down on the root cause of an event.
- Use a team approach when completing the tool.
- The 5 Whys process must be non-punitive.
- Problems or issues may have more than one underlying reason.





Thank you!

Questions: hospitalquality@hsag.com

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