

Writing a Problem Statement

What is a Problem Statement?

When implementing change, it is important to clarify the problem to be solved or opportunity at hand. This guide can be helpful in crafting one or two sentences that identifies and summarizes the problem or opportunity that the quality improvement team is seeking to address.

Before writing a problem statement, quality improvement teams may need to gather evidence and data and understand the root cause of the problem. Knowing the root cause of the problem will help the quality improvement team to avoid addressing only a symptom of the problem.

To write an effective problem statement, use the questions in the table below to prompt the quality improvement team.

Question	→	Example Response
What is the problem?		Patient confirmation of primary care provider is not being entered into the EMR.
Who does this affect?		Physicians, receptionists, quality improvement team.
How does this problem make you feel?		Frustrated.
When is it a problem?		When calculating patient confirmation rates.
Why should I care?		Patients who are no longer paneled to providers are showing up on EMR reports and reminders. There are many patients in the CPAR conflict report.
How does it affect patients?		Patients who have moved/found another primary care provider are being called for appointments.

Tips to consider when writing a problem statement:

- Understand the problem, and don't jump to solutions.
- Focus on 1 problem at a time.
- Keep the statement to 1-2 sentences only.
- Distinguish between the problem and symptoms of the problem.

Example Problem Statement

The quality improvement team is frustrated when they calculate monthly patient confirmation rates because the data is not being entered into the EMR. This leads to inaccurate reporting and wasted time.