



5 Questions to Answer Before Any EMS Product Purchase

Answering these questions provides a blueprint for a quality process and product implementation into the EMS agency.

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By Michael Potts



A field training officer just back from an EMS conference wants a new product implemented to revolutionize prehospital airway management. The officer has the brochure and is hoping you will call the product rep in the next few minutes for some units to begin testing.

Although it's great to have engagement in processes like new product implementation, slow is fast and fast is slow. Before you jump to product testing and evaluation, you need to ask some fact-finding questions.

EMS providers are responsible for fixing patients' problems immediately before other problems take shape. When we see a product at a trade show that will benefit our EMS system we want it implemented yesterday.

All too often we don't have a standardized process to prevent implementation headaches and we race to stock the latest and greatest airway device on every unit before we ask important questions. In a high-performance environment we tend to adopt lean concepts and processes. One of the processes to help mitigate implementation mistakes is to ask five questions directly related to the product and the process. Answering these five questions will develop a blueprint for a quality process and product implementation into the system.

1. How will this benefit the patient?

Answer this question before any type of system change. All changes should focus on the patient and benefit the patient.

Ask the vendor what metrics they use to measure success of the product and which agencies comparable to yours are using the product. Find out the successes and challenges those agencies are experiencing.

2. Why will this benefit the provider?

If the change or product will benefit the patient it should also benefit the EMS provider. The benefit of a 12-lead EKG to the patient is being able to identify cardiac events in the field. The benefit to the EMS provider is basing treatments on what changes are interpreted.

Find out who is using the product and what their providers think of it. Reach out to neighboring services and colleagues in different states or regions. Conferences are great for networking and exchanging business cards to ask questions like this later.

3. Why will this benefit the system?

This question involves training. Can you incorporate the training on this new airway device on an issue identified in the quality-assurance process to make EMS provider training more valuable?

Other training issues related to new product implementation are scheduling, the personnel involved in delivering and receiving the training, and continuous training needs. Don't forget to include your medical first responder, police or fire department colleagues that might be called on to help use this new product in the field.

After training is complete how will you monitor the success of the product? The documentation process and quality-assurance system needs to be capable of capturing usage of the new product and identifying use or implementation problems.

4. What is the cost?

The cost per item only scratches the surface. Do not forget about the cost of training, ongoing training, maintenance such as repairs and preventative maintenance and finally replacement cost. You might also need to decide if you are willing to throw out the product the new device is replacing or if you will use up existing inventory before stocking the new product.

5. Who will manage the project?

This is the final question that drives successful implementation. The project manager is responsible to ensure each person on the project team completes their assigned tasks on time and the project meets its deadlines.

The project manager is not responsible for testing, ordering, training, stocking, replacing or monitoring metrics for improving patient outcomes. Instead, the project manager updates the entire project team, as well as management, on the status of the project and facilitates it moving forward.

The project manager is someone who is independent from the entire process and has no involvement other than guiding the team and collecting deliverables. An effective project manager can cut months, as well as frustrations, from the time it takes to complete the project.

Project task force participation is a training opportunity for the rising leaders in your agency. Creating opportunities for field providers to see other aspects of the organization helps prepare them for advanced and seeing the bigger picture of running a high-performance organization. Finally, before jumping into writing contracts and RFPs, take some time to develop a standardized process to evaluate, test, purchase and implement products. Regardless of the size of your organization, a solid process will benefit the patient, provider and system.

About the author

Michael Potts has been at MedStar Mobile Healthcare in Fort Worth, Texas for the past 15 years. Potts has served a variety of roles as a field provider, field training officer, member of the Critical Care Paramedic and MIH Team and is now the logistics manager. He is responsible for all support services including logistics, fleet maintenance, building maintenance and special events.

The original article can be found at:

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