

Joint Commission Tracer Methodology



What is a Tracer?

- A tracer is the key assessment method used by Joint Commission and surveyors. Its purpose is to assess a healthcare organization's compliance with the JC standards. It involves "tracing" an actual patient's experience through a healthcare organization, using the patient record as a guide. Some tracers also address other aspects of healthcare organizations, such as medication management, medical staff, and leadership.
- Tracers take up a minimum of 60% of the Joint Commission Survey



Target - The surveyor or reviewer targets (or selects) a tracer subject - an individual patient, a system, or a program-specific topic that is based mainly on the organization's care, treatment, and services.

Review - The surveyor or reviewer examines documents such as policies, medical records, management plans, data reports, and service contacts.

Assess - The surveyor or reviewer assesses compliance with standards by making observations and asking questions and sharing concerns in a way that encourages them to answer thoroughly and provide perspective and context.

Communicate - The surveyor or reviewer communicates with tracer participants, asking questions and sharing concerns in a way that encourages them to answer thoroughly and provide perspective and context.

Educate - The surveyor or reviewer educates tracer participants whenever possible to help organizations solve compliance problems.

Report - The surveyor or reviewer reports the results of the tracer, which are shared in a clear and timely way so the organization can make any required improvements.

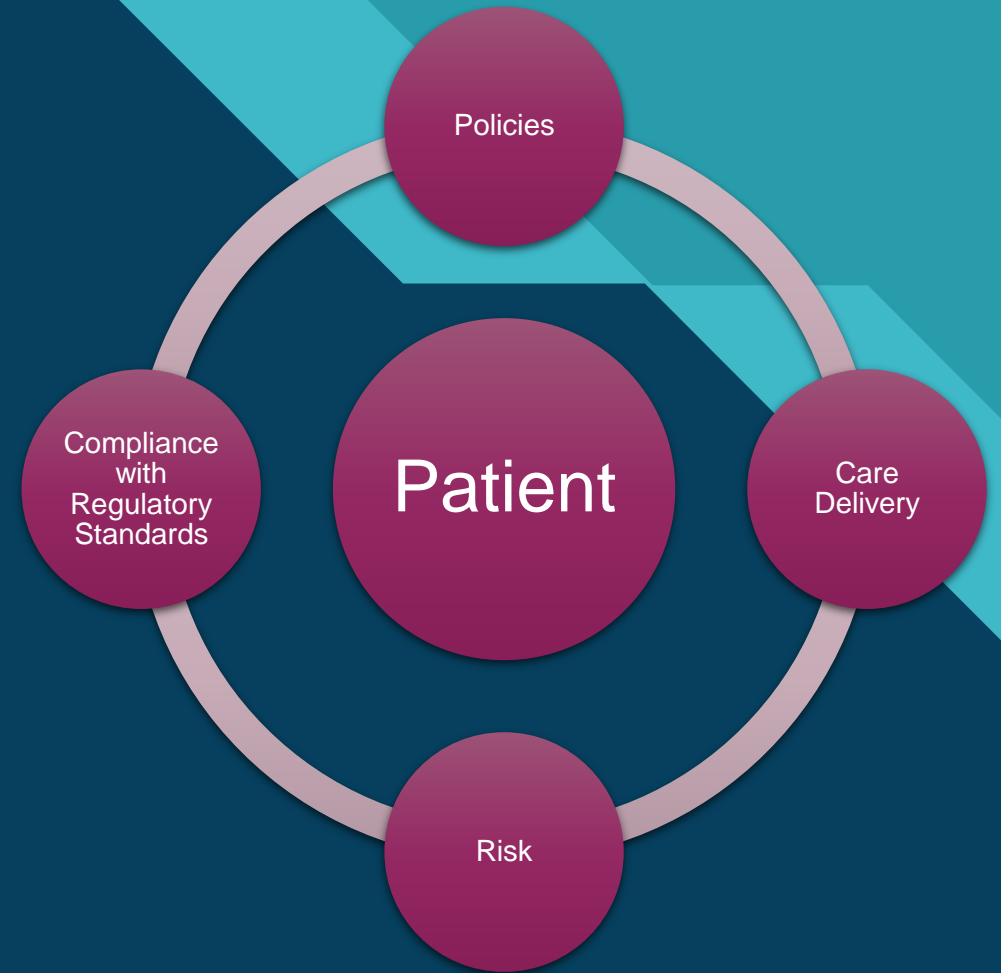
Why Do Tracers?

- Organizations are made up of a series of systems and subsystems. Tracers are an effective way to study these complex systems. Finding the system's imperfections or gaps (what we like to call opportunities for improvement) is critical. That makes it possible to correct them and prevent potential harm to patients, staff or visitors.
- We should do tracers just as a surveyor does a tracer. This is vital to being continuously survey ready!



Types of Tracers - Individual

- Individual (Patient) Tracers – During these tracers, the focus is on an individual patient's experience in the health care organization.
- For example: The surveyor may request a patient chart for an infectious disease patient. The surveyor will review the chart for quality of care, taking into consideration the Infection Prevention policies related to isolation, antibiotic stewardship, documentation and assessment standards, etc.
- Surveyor may request a suicidal patient chart to review policies related to restraint, proper education and training related to restraint, ligature risk assessment completion, etc.



System Tracers

- System Tracers focus on a complex health care system within an organization. These tracers are used to assess medication management, infection control, and data management systems.
- These are the systems that impact the “whole”
- These tracers are often completed through group discussion and review of documents after the surveyor has explored processes and identified any concerns during department walk-throughs.
- For example, if during a walk-through, it was discovered that medications were not properly stored in a clinical area, the surveyor would review policy related to medication safety and storage and then review proper storage, preparation, dispensing, and monitoring of medications that leave the pharmacy.



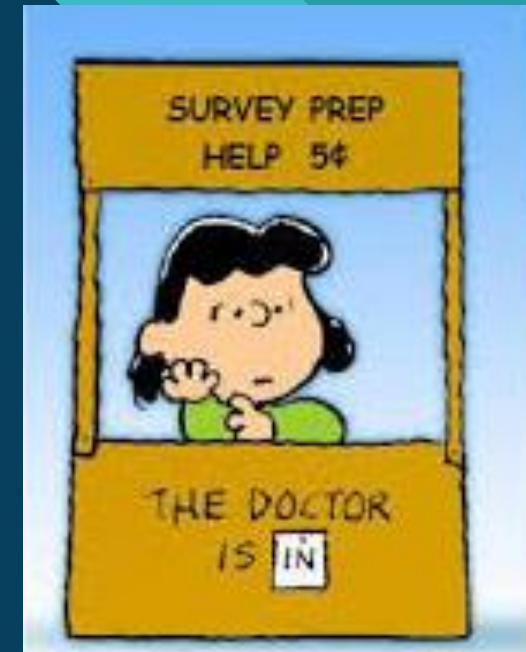
Physical Environment Tracers

- These tracers assess the organization's systems and processes related to the environment of care, emergency management, and fire protection.
- A tracer that assesses the physical environment is often triggered by an environment-based risk a surveyor observes during a patient tracer.
- For example, during a walk-through of the clinical unit, the surveyor notes equipment that is broken or missing a PM tag. This will trigger a larger tracer of the process for managing medical equipment throughout the organization.
- The clinical surveyor as well as the life safety surveyor will be observing for these gaps in compliance.



How Can We Prepare Staff for a Tracer?

- The best survey preparedness tool we have are staff that are prepared and confident to speak with surveyors
- Ask staff the survey readiness questions
- Engage staff in survey readiness prep activities such as hand hygiene monitoring, EOC rounds
- Ensure staff are aware of your department specific quality improvement projects and what you report to PIC. Staff should know areas of focus



Tracer Example: Care of the Patient

- Review a patient's medical record.
- Ask staff: What is the time frame for the initial patient assessment to be completed?
- Who is responsible for initial patient assessments?
- Do you have written policies on the scope and content of patient screenings, assessments, and reassessments?
- Going back to the chart: Were the assessments and reassessments completed per the organization's policy? What gaps were identified?
- Were the goals in a patient's plan of care appropriate and evaluated? Is there proper documentation to support this?
- Ask staff: Please describe the policy and frequencies for reassessment of skin.
- Ask staff: How do you implement interventions to reduce falls based on a patient's assessed risk?

The tracer will develop as questions are asked and answered and chart review is completed. Tracers will typically never be completed the same every time because each patient is different.

