Project Background

The goal of the project is to change the University of Michigan Autopsy Service from a cost center to a source of profit. Currently, autopsies are seen as unprofitable and a waste of time given the advanced imaging and diagnostic technology. This mindset has caused autopsy rates to fall; in 2004, the University of Michigan Hospital performed 306 autopsies, while this number in 2005 and 2007 has dropped to 293 and 249, respectively. There is a growing concern about the drop off in the autopsy rate because research continues to find that autopsies often uncover unknown facts about the patient that can be used to educate physicians. Also, autopsies are an excellent way for residents to hone their skills as they are required to perform 50 autopsies prior to passing their board exams. With an average of 26 residents, this is a rate of approximately 325 per year – far more than what is currently performed at the hospital.

Project Plan and Objectives

If the University of Michigan (UM) Pathology Department can determine a way to market autopsy services to outside counties in a profitable way, the department will be able to supply the residents with more autopsies and could potentially create a revenue stream for the hospital. The project plan is to break down the sources of cost and revenue for autopsy services. The team will analyze the detailed operations of the autopsy services and how it affects other departments inside and outside of the hospital. The team will also need to determine the pricing structure for each type of autopsy based on relative costs, competitor pricing, etc. The study will be based on a stand-alone facility and prices of contracting out services. There appear to be at least three potential groups who will need autopsy services: UM Hospital, Washtenaw County Medical Examiner autopsies, and the medical examiner autopsies from other counties. In addition, we will look at the current operations of the autopsy service to find relevant capacity constraints, utilizations and inefficiencies.

Metrics for Success (Final Deliverable)

This project will be a success if the team can provide the UM Pathology Department a detailed description of autopsy costs and potential revenues, and a plan to drive revenue by attracting more autopsies to be performed by the hospital. In addition, we will provide operational recommendations relating to streamlining processes and making the overall system more efficient. As a conclusion to the project, we will present our findings and a possible plan for implementation to the Department and other key stakeholders.

Constraints

The team will not focus on improvements in the support areas such as pathology, radiology, toxicology and will simply report the current costs and impacts of these areas on the autopsy process.