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Capacity Management at the Surgical Intensive Care Unit at St. Mary's Hospital

Paul M. and Gerald K., associates at Strategic Consultancy Services, are on their way to meet the Director of the Surgical Intensive Care Unit (SICU) at St. Mary's Hospital. After two months of analyzing information and interviewing employees at the hospital, they have come up with a set of recommendations to improve bed utilization and thereby reduce the severity of the capacity problems facing the unit. They are eager to share their results with the Director and hope their recommendations will help to improve the unit's performance.

Three months before, Paul and Gerald were commissioned to respond to an urgent SICU problem: recent increases in the number of patients have led to a demand for beds that exceeds the supply, especially at certain times of the week. High demand for beds has resulted in several problems: the cancellation of patient transfers, daily rearrangements, periodic postponement of elective surgeries and increased number of hours spent by personnel responsible for bed-management. This was a serious problem for SICU. The cancellations implied increased costs for both the hospital and for patients, who sometimes were already admitted to the hospital when surgeries were canceled.

The contract's terms of reference specifically required Paul and Gerald to examine the inflow and utilization of SICU beds and to develop innovative approaches to improve SICU's utilization. SICU's Director was especially interested in getting recommendations on how to utilize SICU's fixed bed capacity more efficiently without an expansion of hospital infrastructure.

Background

St. Mary's Hospital

St. Mary's Hospital is one the largest medical centers in the world. It is comprised of three hospitals: University Hospital, P. Smith Children's Hospital and Women's Hospital. These hospitals collectively admitted over 60,000 patients in 2005.

St. Mary's Hospital Intensive Care Units

Intensive Care Units (ICUs) are a costly and essential component of a medical center's ability to offer comprehensive medical therapy. ICUs provide specialized intensive care to patients who are seriously or

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