

## CASE STUDY

# Yale New Haven Health System

## Leading Change

Under the tutelage of Lori Lee, Yale New Haven Health System transformed its supply chain and weathered a supplier transition at the outset of the pandemic.



Many leaders shy away from implementing big changes at the outset of their tenures. Not so for Lori Lee, senior vice president of clinical operations at Yale New Haven Health System (YNHHS). Lee not only initiated a distributor transition during her second year at the helm of the health system's supply chain, but also proceeded with the transition even as the COVID-19 pandemic was engulfing New England.

### A Career of Leadership

Clearly, Lee isn't afraid of a challenge. She began her career as a pharmacist and moved into management and as the health system's first chief pharmacy officer, wherein her charge was to develop a systemwide pharmacy department.

After five years of working to create a corporate structure for the health system's pharmacy operations, Lee was asked to lead the health system's supply chain initiative. She immediately began looking at supply chain through a patient care lens by determining what clinicians need to provide health outcomes. "It was much more focused on the contract than what we were contracting for and that needed to change," she says.

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One of her charges was to spearhead a restructure of the value analysis focus for supply chain, implementation of the system's new enterprise resource planning system to better serve the organization. Next came a massive RFP to find a new medical/surgical distributor for the health system.

### Guiding the RFP Process

When Lee stepped into her role, supply chain had been using the same medical/surgical distributor for more than 30 years. She engaged Vizient® to help formally guide the RFP process and the logistics of the resulting transition.

"Because every company is a little different, it was like we were trying to compare apples to oranges," she says. "Vizient provided help in comparing and putting data into writing, validated the financial pieces and served as our expert and our resource."

Blending Vizient experts and YNHHS staff members into a single team was an important element of Lee's leadership during the resulting transition. Vizient helps to make sure the entire team is trained and understands the tools that are available, some of which are complex.



### Changing Distributors Amid COVID-19

Planning for the new distributor transition took 18 months to get all of the approvals in place and the processes established. Because of upfront work, the transition, which began April 1, 2020, went better than expected, "I was lucky I'd been in the role for two years," says Lee. "If it had been earlier, we would have struggled to get through the pandemic."

Any big change has the potential to cause workflow disruption. However, the pandemic was surging just as the department was planning to go live with the transition. Reflecting, Lee says, "During the pandemic there was rapid adoption. If we got different items that were clinically acceptable such as an isolation gown, the staff wore it."

### Putting the Spotlight on a Career of Leadership



Lori Lee's leadership excellence has not gone unnoticed. She is a 2021 recipient of the Carol Emmot Fellowship, a prestigious group of leaders from healthcare organizations across the country. Participation demonstrates Lee's continued commitment to learning and growing as a leader.

Along with handling the responsibilities of leading two departments and participating in a challenging fellowship program, Lee is involved in the COVID-19 vaccine rollout for Yale New Haven Health (YNHHS). "We run eight mass vaccination sites. It's been incredible," she says. The goal is for YNHHS to vaccinate about one-third of the population of Connecticut, or roughly 1 million people.

As a leader, Lori Lee has consistently made difficult decisions, fearlessly. In some cases, such as continuing with the transition to a new vendor during a pandemic, making those decisions entailed a certain amount of risk. Staying focused on what clinicians need to provide outstanding patient care through focused teamwork has more than proven Lee's leadership skills.

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●● The silver lining of the pandemic is now people have more understanding as to why supply chain is important. ●●

—Lori Lee, senior vice president of clinical operations, Yale New Haven Health

### A Culture of Collaboration

Building a team isn't a one-time endeavor, and Lee is working to make sure that the health system's supply chain remains focused on patient care. In order to do that, she is building a bench of future leaders.

Working with Vizient as a partner, aligning the values of the two organizations, and involving Vizient in onboarding and training ensures the entire staff understands the strategies and goals of the department as well as what tools are available to fulfill them.

"In partnership with the Vizient on-site resources, Vizient value analysis teams, and the Northeast Purchasing Coalition (NPC), YNHHS leadership supported a local two-day value analysis workshop for their nursing team and many others in the New England area. It was a win-win for YNHHS and Vizient," says Nancy Swiercynski, senior principal, member performance, Vizient.

Another important element in securing the future of the department is making sure the right talent is available to

step into leadership roles. YNHHS currently has two part-time medical directors in supply chain — a move Lee said that was motivated by balancing a need to nurture physician talent in the role and ensuring the role is covered should physicians move on to new opportunities.

"The silver lining of the pandemic is now people have more understanding as to why supply chain is important," Lee says. This was borne out when she began recruiting for the medical director position and received more than 30 applicants, which she says is "unheard of."

In many ways, Lee's experience leading the pharmacy department helped her provide value to the health system's supply chain. She began by asking "What are the clinician's needs to take care of the patient?" By including the voice of a physician, nurses and front line caregivers in supply chain, safety and quality, integration of care became the focus, rather focusing solely on cost savings.



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