# Case Study: Hawaii Pacific Health

# Why HPH Sends Their Entire Leadership Team to the IHI National Forum

Melinda Ashton, MD, first went to the IHI National Forum in 1999. “It was an amazing experience to be there just after the IOM report *To Err is Human* was introduced,” said Ashton, Vice President of Quality and Patient Safety at Hawaii Pacific Health. “I found sources of information and inspiration.”

Hawaii Pacific Health (HPH) is the state’s largest health care provider, with four hospitals and more than 50 locations. It started its quality journey in 2003: HPH leaders had learned about what was possible in quality improvement but realized that they were set up to do quality *assurance*, not quality improvement.

In 2003, HPH sent six people to the Forum. “We knew we needed to think about how to engage physicians in our improvement and wanted to engage some of our physician leaders in that planning,” Ashton said.

In 2004, HPH expanded the group, including many more physicians, board members, and other executive leaders. **Since 2004, HPH has brought 20 to 24 people to the Forum each year.**

“Last year, one of our biggest learnings was the importance of supporting the clinicians who provide care to our patients. This wasn’t new, but the Forum really reinforced it,” Ashton said. “There was also strong support for Don Berwick’s call for a reduction in measurement — although we each have our own thoughts about what measures he was referring to!”

## Why HPH Invests in Sending Staff to the IHI National Forum

HPH has found that sending a group to the Forum has been very useful, and it’s now an annual tradition. Early on, HPH leadership learned from IHI that improvement requires will, ideas, and execution. **“Attending the Forum was a great way to build will among leaders who really hadn’t been sure about the possibilities,” Ashton said.**

At first, Ashton said, some of the information gathered at the Forum was not widely accepted back at the proverbial “ranch.” Over time, having a larger group of leaders who understood the ideas was helpful. **Today, HPH has so many Forum veterans across the organization that quality thinking has seeped into the culture**. Leaders find that staff have more informed conversations about improvement, even if there isn’t a “quality person” in the room.

## How HPH Manages Staff Attendance

Flying more than 20 senior leaders from Hawaii to Florida — and covering for them while they’re away — is no small task. At HPH, **the CEO decides who to invite to the Forum, with input from other senior leaders, based on who is involved in advancing current strategic priorities**. The office of the Vice President for Quality and Safety pays for and manages the fees and travel reimbursements.

Most importantly, the HPH CEO has attended the Forum each year, along with a chief executive from other facilities, which signals to the entire organization that the group’s attendance is a priority. It creates the feeling that an invitation to attend is an honor, and cooperation with coverage follows. HPH tries to allow several months of lead time for planning coverage for staff attending the conference.

## Tips for Making the Most of the Investment

HPH has developed a great process over the years for harvesting learning from the Forum. **Ashton asks each attendee to submit the three top ideas he or she brought home**. Then, they discuss those ideas as a group. “We have some pretty good conversations about what we can work on, how it would fit into current priorities, and next steps,” Ashton said. “We make it clear that we will not be able to work on all ideas, which helps to reinforce our commitment to prioritization.”

Another tip from HPH: arranging group dinners each night during the Forum. “We don’t mandate that people attend each night, but we find that most do come,” Ashton said. “This has provided a fantastic way to build relationships among physicians and leaders from many parts of our system, under circumstances where they are not distracted by patient care responsibilities, and while they are learning new ways to think about how we provide care. This adds a lot to our ROI!”