Scenario 3

The main processing lab receives a large number of specimens with multiple tests requested and most of the specimens are delivered together by a courier two times a day. Within the past 3 months there have been several sample aliquots that have been mislabeled. There was a new person hired recently but some of the mislabeling occurred when the new tech was not in the lab.

Focused Questions

Why did the processing techs mislabel some specimens? Are there multiple possibilities for the cause?

How do you investigate?

How do you prove you have found the root cause?

Talking Points

There are so many possible reasons that it is important to write them all down and make a chart ranking the likelihood of the cause.

Find out if the errors occur on certain days or at certain times of the day.

Has the volume of specimens increased? Did the requisition forms change? Did the staffing change other than the new tech?

Did anything change in the configuration of the lab?

Were there some techs that never made errors and if so, did those techs ever process during the busy times? Did those techs do something different than those that did make mistakes?

To determine the reason it will require interviewing everyone. Must stress that no one is being blamed and that you are trying to figure out what is causing the techs to make errors so you can make changes.

The new person doesn't have sufficient training or is slow and feels rushed and gets confused.

The new person feels intimidated by senior techs and doesn't feel comfortable asking for help.

The new person wasn't properly trained or wasn't checked sufficiently after training.

The other techs that also mislabeled samples reduce the likelihood that the above is the sole reason.

Both new and senior techs are getting distracted. The cause of distraction may be the root cause.

Not everyone is able to stay focused on the tasks.

Lots of potential reasons and after changes are made it is critical to monitor to determine if the rate of errors decreases.