

Problem Solving Tools

The 5 Whys

This is a simple diagnostic tool that allows the team to identify the root cause of a problem.

Benefits of The 5 Whys

- Can direct you to the root of a problem.
- Simple and quick to use.

How to use The 5 Whys

1. Identify a facilitator to keep the team focused and on track.
2. Assemble the team who are familiar with the problem and the process you are trying to fix.
3. Define the problem. Discuss it with the team and write it down for the team to see e.g. on a whiteboard.
4. Ask the first “Why” – Why is the problem occurring, search for answers that are factual and are a true account of things that actually happened and not guessing at what might have happened. Record this below the problem.
5. Ask “why” four more times by framing the questions each time in response to the answer you have just recorded and again record your responses.
6. Know when to stop – you will reveal the nature of the root cause when asking “why” produces no more useful responses and you can go no further.

Tip: Try and move quickly from one question to the next, to ensure no team members jump to conclusions before honest answers are given.

The 5 Whys Example

Be Well Health Clinic have just received their POLAR practice report from EMPHN. This report has identified that the practice has a data quality issue and the Practice Manager decides to enlist a small team to find one of the root causes of this problem. She starts by asking the team “Why does our practice have a data quality issue?”

5-Why Analysis Template	
What is the problem?	Why does our general practice have a data quality issue?
1 st Why?	The clinical team are not aware we have a data quality issue.
2 nd Why?	Not all clinical team members have been informed we have an issue.
3 rd Why?	We do not have a consistent communication method or regular team meetings.
4 th Why?	Clinical team meetings are not held on a regular basis.
5 th Why?	The team meetings are not scheduled at a time when all clinical team members can attend and as a result are often cancelled.

As a result of this exercise, the practice has identified one root cause. The Practice Manager has identified that they need to review the team meeting schedules and make a time that will allow all team members an opportunity to attend and to allow for discussion of areas for improvement such as data quality. She has also decided that when running team meetings to capture the minutes that can be shared with those team members that cannot attend the meeting.