

# Enhancing the Environment of Care (EOC) Rounds Process

Moving beyond minimum accreditation standards to create a culture of continuous improvement

Katie Guebara, RN<sup>1</sup>; Stephanie Lei, RN<sup>1</sup>; Renee Mathews, RN<sup>1</sup>; Trisha Miller, MS<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University Health Services; <sup>2</sup>Department of Counseling Psychology, College of Education  
The University of Texas at Austin



## Background & Rationale

Healthyhorns clinical service areas\* are accredited by the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care (AAAHC) every three years. In accordance with AAAHC Safety Standard SAF.140,<sup>1</sup> organizations must implement “a written safety program [that] addresses the environment of care and safety of patients, staff, and others.” Although AAAHC outlines general domains these programs must cover, each organization is responsible for designing programs that meet local, state, and federal regulations and are tailored to organizational size, complexity, and unique needs. This includes selecting and defining measurable compliance indicators within each domain, assigning organization-wide and department-specific domains and indicators, developing user-friendly documentation tools, setting schedules for conducting rounds and reporting findings, and establishing robust follow-up procedures.

To meet these requirements, Healthyhorns has implemented quarterly Environment of Care (EOC) rounds in which leadership and staff assess compliance with infection prevention and safety standards. These rounds are essential for identifying near misses and maintaining regulatory readiness between AAAHC accreditation cycles. They also promote a culture of safety by involving leadership and staff in the review process, reinforcing our commitment to quality and accountability, and ensuring timely follow-through on identified issues.<sup>2-4</sup>

\*Healthyhorns is comprised of clinics that provide medical and mental health care (University Health Services; Counseling & Mental Health Center) and prevention, education, and outreach services (Longhorn Wellness Center).

## Implementation Methods

- **Frequency of rounds.** Rounds are conducted quarterly for clinical areas and biannually for non-clinical areas (e.g., Business Services, Information Technology).
- **Interdepartmental review.** Staff conduct rounds in departments other than their own, creating a “peer review” effect. During AAAHC accreditation survey years, leaders conduct rounds. During non-survey years, nursing staff conduct rounds to increase staff engagement and understanding of the process.
- **Checklist composition.** Checklist items include elements of compliance required by AAAHC Safety (SAF) and Infection Prevention & Control (IPC) Standards,<sup>8</sup> Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC)<sup>9</sup> and Joint Commission<sup>6</sup> resources, and Healthyhorns Risk Management (RM) Committee<sup>1</sup> recommendations.
- **Documentation & scoring.** Staff surveyors assign scores to each checklist item based on whether standards are met (1 vs. 0) in an Excel workbook with separate sheets for each department. Item scores are summed to create domain-specific and overall scores by department. Each checklist also includes sections to document specific follow-up actions, responsible staff, and completion dates.
- **Presentation of findings.** The RM Committee reviews EOC findings quarterly, recommends and tracks follow-up actions, and recommends checklist additions/updates for future EOC rounds.

<sup>8</sup>ADM (Administration), CRD (Clinical Records), EMG (Emergency Management), FAC (Facilities & Equipment), LRD (Laboratory & Radiology), MED (Medication Management), PRR (Patient Rights, Responsibilities & Protections).  
<sup>1</sup>The Healthyhorns RM Committee is chaired by the Infection Prevention and Safety Coordinator and comprised of clinical and administrative leadership, the AAAHC Accreditation Manager, and representation from major non-clinical areas (e.g., Business Services, Materials Management, Information Technology). The RM committee oversees risk management, infection prevention, incident reporting and trending, emergency preparedness, and safety.

## Environment of Care Rounds Checklist

**Table 1. Selected items from Healthyhorns Environment of Care Checklist that supplement elements of compliance for AAAHC required Standard SAF.140 (written safety program addressing safety of patients, staff, and others).**

Score	Standard	Met	Not Met	N/A	Comments
	<b>Safety:</b>				
	Fire extinguishers are secure and inspections are up to date.				
	Staff are able to articulate the appropriate steps and location of blood spill kit.				
	Oxygen tanks are kept at least 5 ft away from any combustible items.				
	Restroom emergency pull cords hanging freely & not wrapped around handlebar.				
	Exit lights are illuminated.				
	<b>Cleanliness and Storage:</b>				
	Hallways are clean and uncluttered; equipment is kept to one side.				
	Supplies are stored 6” above floor, 18” below ceiling.				
	Medical supply closets are free of corrugated boxes.				
	<b>Infection Control Best Practice:</b>				
	Food, drinks, cosmetics not in patient care areas.				

Note. This table does not include all checklist items that supplement AAAHC Standard SAF.140. Elements were selected for illustrative purposes.

## Discussion

Establishing consistent, robust EOC rounds increases our ability to provide high-quality healthcare delivered in an environment that meets regulatory standards and exceeds accreditation requirements. Leadership support and involvement in EOC rounds demonstrates that quality, safety, and continuous improvement are organizational priorities. Nursing staff engagement in the survey process cultivates a deeper understanding of regulatory standards and evidence-based practices for infection prevention and safety via experiential learning. Findings have informed many workflow improvements to promote quality and safety, including implementing cleaning logs in the autoclave room, creating weekly eyewash station checklists, better preparing departments for medical equipment inspections, and placing posters in supply closets outlining proper storage protocols.

## References

<sup>1</sup>AAAHC. 2023. Accreditation Handbook for Ambulatory Health Care, v43.  
<sup>2</sup>Chassin, MR & Loeb, JM. The ongoing quality improvement journey: next stop, high reliability. Health Affairs, 2011, 30(4):559-568.  
<sup>3</sup>Zirges, C, et al. Multidisciplinary environment of care rounds: Findings the infection control professional can use in daily practice. American Journal of Infection Control, 2004, 32(3):E80.  
<sup>4</sup>Shaw, KN, et al. Creating unit-based patient safety walk-rounds in a pediatric emergency department. Clinical Pediatric Emergency Medicine, 2006, 7(4):231-237.  
<sup>5</sup>APIC. Environmental Rounds Worksheet for Infection Prevention.  
<sup>6</sup>Joint Commission. 2020. Tool 2-4 EC Tour Checklist. EC Made Easy, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition.

## How to Use:

- Fill in your copy and content to fit into the poster.
- Maintain the use of the Healthyhorns brand palette in particular primary to secondary colors with limited use of tertiary colors. Use the default font (Aptos or comparable).
- Customize the header points and associated content while maintaining the structure of the model.
- Use the appropriate departmental signature and maintain the size/proportion.
- Use the graphical tools within PowerPoint to maintain vector graphic integrity (resolution independent) which is best for printing. Note: photos will need to be high resolution (300ppi at 100% size) to avoid interpolation (pixelation) when printed.

## Size and Resize:

- Default size is 48" wide x 36" tall.
- To change the size, go to "Design" > "Slide Size" > "Custom Slide Size" and select "Ensure Fit" to not lose content from the viewable area.
- 56" wide x 56" tall is the maximum size; if a larger size is needed, proportionally scale down, e.g., needed poster size: 72" wide x 42" tall. Resize slide size: 36" wide x 21" tall (50% scale), then print at 200% (final size 72" x 42")

## Save as PDF for Printing:

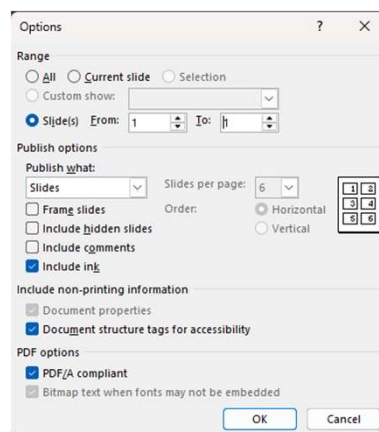
1. Click "Save" before the next step.
2. Then, go to "File" > "Save As" > select ".pdf" (file type).
3. Then, click "more options..."
4. Then, click "Options" button to set:  
Slide from "1" to "1" (to exclude this page)  
Check "Include ink"  
Check "PDF/A compliant"  
Click "OK" to save setting.
5. Select "Standard (online publishing and printing)."
6. Change the file name, if needed.
7. Click "Save" when done.

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Healthyhorns Brand Palette

