



EPISODE 36 - Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA)

Transcript

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Imagine you land yourself a management role. Maybe it's the job you've always wanted or maybe you stumbled on a management role. You find yourself in a position where a particular workflow isn't working. Things aren't going well and there's lots of complaints either by your employees or the people your department serves. So you're now aware there's an issue. Maybe you have a lot of issues you need to work through. Which in all honesty, tends to be the case in management. Or you want to improve a workflow.

When I was a critical care dietitian, I wanted to implement a volume based feeding protocol in the Intensive Care Units. As a critical care dietitian, I noticed the patients often missed out on important nutrition because their feeds were held for procedures or surgery. Sometimes the procedure would be cancelled. And the feeds sometimes weren't restarted. So this was a problem. It was a documented problem and volume based feeding was something that can help fix this problem. So I went to my manager with the problem and a plan and asked if I could work on a project or workflow to improve the tube feeding administration in the ICU. That's when we used PDCA.

[Music and Intro]

Hey there. In this episode, I wanted to review a concept that was asked by one of the listeners. Management is a big section of the exam. As of the time of this recording, it's about 21% of the exam. And it makes sense because a lot of dietitians take on management roles. Generally speaking, any food service role a dietitian will hold is in management. Most will oversee employees which is management. Managing people and processes. So these questions will come up.

In particular in this episode, I want to go over Plan, Do, Check and Act which you might also hear it as Plan, Do, Study, Act. Either way, PDCA is the acronym for Plan, Do, Check, Act. It's a cycle you go through when implementing a new process or workflow or making a change to a current workflow. And we do this all the time in management. When I was studying for the RD Exam, I couldn't fathom management. I couldn't wrap my head around it and I honestly had a little block. I was so certain management wasn't for me and would never be for me. I learned it, and passed those questions on the exam but didn't end up working in management for almost 10 years after taking the RD Exam. But, I ended up in management and didn't think I ever would. So again, you don't know. And to be super honest, I didn't reflect back and think, "Oh ya, I remember studying this for the RD

Exam". I truly didn't. I learned as I worked and learned along the way. BUT, my internship did give me experience seeing others manage and working as a dietitian with a manager gave me insight into how things are done in management. And for a long time, I didn't pursue opportunities to go into management when they became available. It wasn't until the time was right in my life that I felt I could proceed with at least applying and seeing what happened. And it was the perfect time to apply because I was actually very happy in the dietitian role I had at that time. I was working in pediatrics and loved my patients and the team I worked with. And I truly feel, at least for me, that's the best time to pursue something new because there's no desperation. If it happens, fabulous and if not, the current job isn't a bad one to have. So that's my little bit of insight. Turns out, the job became mine and I embraced it with open arms, fresh eyes and ready to learn everything I could.

And one of the concepts I learned by doing was PDCA whenever we made a change to a current workflow or process.

Since my love and superpower is teaching through stories, this is the perfect time to use a story or example to explain this concept or cycle used in management.

Say for example, you're working at a hospital. There's an issue with the items available in the unit pantry. You're the nutrition manager at the hospital. The nurses are complaining to you that they run out of juices in the middle of the night or there's not enough gelatin or pudding. You hear from nurses from several units that are having the same problem. So you know you have an issue.

This is where P for Plan comes into place. Plan is when you're aware there's an issue. Somethings been brought to your attention that isn't working so you know you need to make a change. You're planning to make a change and you're looking into what you can do, what processes you can implement that will change or improve the process. You might reach out to other people to see how they stock their pantries especially if you work at a hospital that has several "sister" hospitals. For example, Mayo Clinic has several hospitals. Or if you work for a contracted Food Service company like Morrison or Sodexo. You can reach out to other accounts to see how they do it. So this is all part of your Planning. After you look into things, you decide you need to adjust the PAR level of the items in the pantries.

D is for Do. This is where you maybe choose one unit to adjust the PAR level and the items available in that units pantry. So you make a change but on a small scale. Kind of like a test of change. Maybe you decide to change things for a few weeks and then reach out for feedback on how things are going. During that time, you might be collecting data to see how much extra supplies are needed in order to accommodate the new PAR levels and you

ask the nursing manager to collect data too. Ask them to check in with their staff to get their feedback and you set a time on the calendar to come together to see how things went with the new process.

You can't skip the "do" step because this is where the change happens. It happens by doing.

C is for Check. This is when you check in to do a review. You check to see how things are going. What's gone well. What hasn't gone well. Analyze the data collected and all the comments from the staff. Review the feedback collaboratively. Checking is so incredibly important because the point of making a change is to meet a goal, whatever that is. In this case, the goal is for nursing to have the supplies they need in the pantry and for food and nutrition to have an established PAR level so they know what to send to the units. If you don't check to see how things are going, you might be going in the wrong direction which doesn't help you achieve your goal. So you have to check and see how things are going.

A is for Act. This is when you take action based on what you learned or based on your check point. So say you determined you have to make some changes. You act on those changes. Or say you learn from the "check" process that everything went well. The new PAR level was great for their needs. The items available are appropriate for their patients and their demand. So now you can permanently put this new process in action. You might also "spread" the process to all the other nursing units based on the success of this "study" or PDCA/PDSA.

Now, let's say during the check process you find out that they still need more supplies. Or maybe you learn the patients don't really need more pudding but there's a much larger demand for yellow gelatin (because red gelatin isn't allowed for several patients). So you'll continue to "do" the process, making the adjustment with less pudding and more yellow gelatin and then check back in a few weeks later to see how things are going. And you find out during the "check" in process that things are going great. The PAR levels are exactly what they need and the patients, staff and kitchen employees have no concerns. The complaints have gone away and it's also improved time management because nursing doesn't have to wait for the items and the kitchen staff don't have to take another trip just to deliver gelatin. So you move on to the act step and may decide to now act with other units and implement the same PAR levels in all the nursing units in the hospital.

So that's PDCA when implementing or changing a process or workflow. It's sometimes called Deming cycle. And this is used regularly in management when implementing new or improving current processes/workflows. Think about it this way. You don't want to change something without following up so see if the change or improvement is actually helping. Did it improve things or make things worse? If it made things worse, you may

choose to scrap it or you might make an adjustment to the plan and redo the PDCA based on the modification. Go through the cycle again and see how it goes.

Going back to the opening story where I shared how I used PDCA to implement a volume based feeding protocol. So the Plan was to implement a volume based feeding protocol BECAUSE patients weren't getting their full feeding prescription on a daily basis. This can happen for procedures or even when feeds have to be held before and after giving certain medications such as dilantin which is an anti-seizure medication. So the problem is patients weren't getting enough tube feeds and the potential solution was to implement a volume based feeding protocol. I worked with nursing and the physicians to implement the feeding protocol. The next step was to do it. Once we thought we had a solid plan in place and all the stack holders involved were educated and aware of the plan, we implemented it. We did volume based feedings in one of the ICU's. While we implemented it, we collected data. Then we checked in. Did the volume of tube feeds patients received increase with the protocol? Did patients do well? Did things go well with nursing? In this case, things did. There were a couple misses but most had an explanation. So we acted on those challenges, made the adjustments we needed to make from our check in and continued towards our goal of making sure patients in the ICU got their full tube feeding prescription.

And this is the thing. You can actually use PDCA with anything. You can use it in your personal life. Think of something you want to change in your life. Maybe you want to start meal planning because super time is chaotic every night at your house. So you put together a plan to come up with a menu on Saturdays, get the supplies and prep on Sundays and repeat the following Saturday. Once you come up with the plan, you start doing it. You do the menu on Saturday then you do the prep on Sunday. You check in with yourself to see how it's going. Did you drift from your plan? What's going well. If you find you are struggling, you may need to adjust your plan. That's when you go back. Fix your plan or make an adjustment. Do it again. Check again and then Act on the changes. So there you go. That's a review of PDCA. Plan, Do, Check, Act.

Stay on top of your study game. There's no limits to achieving the success you so deeply desire. Until next time.

[Music and Outro]