# Fishbone Diagram

Team-based Process for Identifying Root Causes of Practice Challenges

- Structured team process used to identify causes of a health care problem
- Informs the development of an action plan to improve care or outcomes
- Brainstorm possible causes of a problem and sort them into categories
- Be sure to include teammates who understand the practice process

Sample Fishbone Diagram
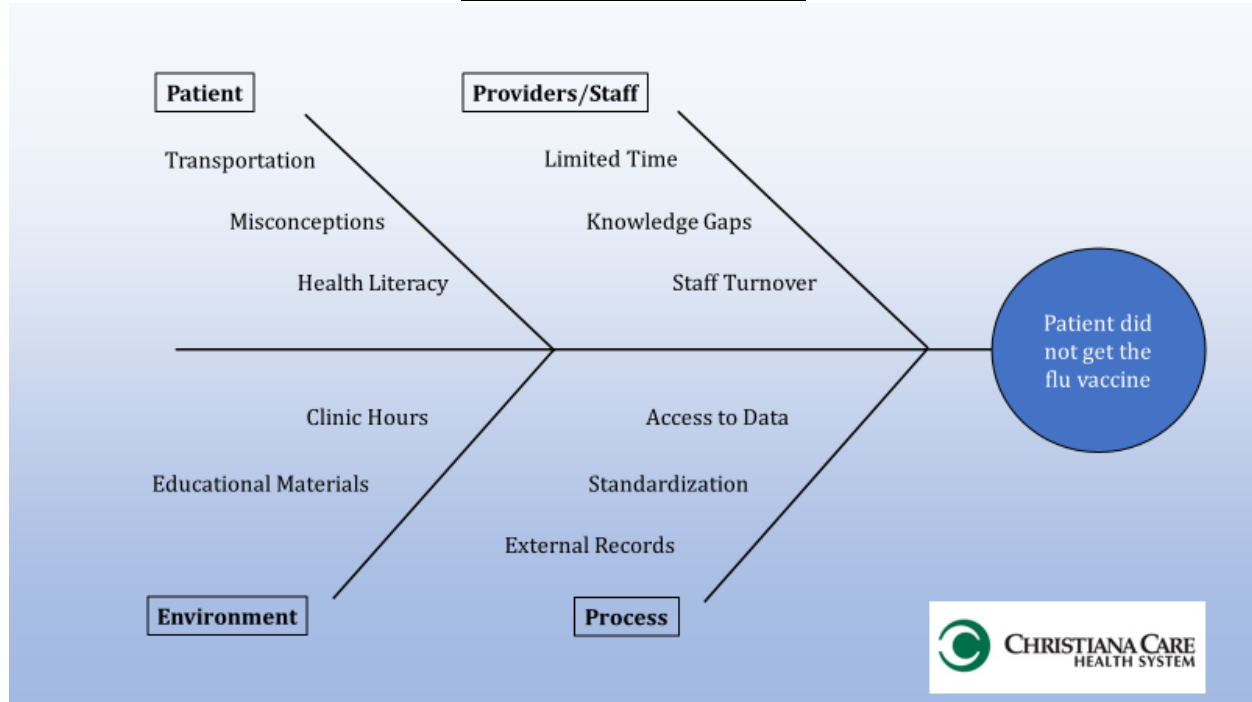
Step-by-Step Process

Step 1:
- Identify and agree upon the problem. Be clear and specific. Write at fish mouth.
- *Example: Low influenza immunization rates especially in black patients.*

Step 2:
- Identify major categories of causes that can lead to the problem.
- Common categories include: Patient, Staff, Environment, and Process.
- These are the major branches of the fishbone diagram.

Step 3:
- Brainstorm all the possible contributors to each major problem category.
- *Example: Misperceptions as a sub-branch of the patient branch.*
- Probe why each idea could be a culprit, with it becoming a sub-branch.

- Keep probing each cause, by asking why until you believe you have probed as deeply as possible as a group. These will become your potential levers for change!

Other Tips:
- Draw your fishbone diagram on a flip chart or chalk board during the course of the team meeting.
- Have each team member write their answers to the question "Why?" on sticky notes and place them on the fishbones.
- Vote for the top 3 causes along each major category.
- There can be more than one root cause and contributing factor.

Select References:
Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), Using Root Cause Analysis to Improve Quality and Performance.
https://www.ahrq.gov/evidencenow/tools/root-cause-analysis.html
Institute for Healthcare Improvement, Cause and Effect Diagram. http://www.ihi.org/resources/Pages/Tools/CauseandEffectDiagram.aspx