Every single operation, no matter how small or how large, can have a surgical site infection.

And they cause a significant amount of morbidity, and by that I mean patients suffering more than they need to.

Nobody wants to leave the hospital with a complication of surgery, and particularly an infection. They expect better, and they deserve better.

Reducing harm to patients

If there's something one hospital can teach or transfer to another that will minimize their risk of getting a surgical site infection, that's what we're here for.

Defining the problem

There are multiple factors, there are surgical technique factors, there are work processes in the operating room, there are patient-specific processes, such as the preparation of the patient prior to the surgery, risk factors – and it goes beyond the surgeon.

It's about defining what surgical site infection is and it's about compiling the data accurately and going out of your way to find out whether your patient had an infection or not.

Changing systems and processes

John Morton, M.D.
Associate Professor, General Surgery  
Stanford Hospital and Clinics  
The biggest challenges when it comes to reducing surgical site infection, believe it or not, is not lack of data, it’s not lack of good intentions, it’s change.

Allan E. Siperstein, M.D.  
Chairman, Endocrine Surgery Center  
Cleveland Clinic  
So it’s multiple, multiple different factors that need to be changed. A lot of these are asking members of the surgical team to do something in a different way than they’re used to doing it. That is often challenging as well.

Targeting colorectal surgery  

Amy Halverson, M.D.  
Colorectal Surgeon  
Northwestern Memorial Hospital  
Surgical site infections in colorectal surgery are more common than other types of surgery, and theoretically that’s due to the fact that you’re operating on the colon and you have more exposure to the bacteria.

Shirin Towfigh, M.D.  
Associate Professor, Surgery  
Cedars-Sinai Medical Center  
It’s the number one highest rate of surgical site infections of all the operations that are performed electively, and therefore I think we can make the biggest impact on trying to bring that large number down to something more manageable.

John Morton, M.D.  
We wanted to tackle colorectal surgery in specific because there’s a lot of opportunity for improvement. You know, when you’ve got maybe 40 percent wound infection rates in different places around the country, there’s a place we can make a difference.

Partnering for success  

Mark Chassin, M.D.  
The American College of Surgeons is a very important partner in the center’s project on surgical site infection, and the reason is that the College has created a program that collects very detailed clinical information that allows their surgeon members to compare their outcomes by taking into account all the variability in the patients that they operate on so they can compare apples to apples and then learn how they can improve their processes so that the outcomes for their patients get better.

Clifford Y. Ko, M.D.  
Director, NSQIP  
American College of Surgeons  
We really hope to identify where the gaps are and the problems are and the issues are and find solutions such that these things can be shared amongst all the hospitals that are performing colectomies and really, in the end, benefiting the surgical patients.

John Morton, M.D.  
And our goal ought to be a 50 percent reduction in surgical site infections. We have the data, we have the tools, let’s get it done.