

TITLE: From Referral to Recovery: Reducing Breakdown Points in the Communication Chain

AUTHOR: Anna Crapps, DCS

BACKGROUND

At Mississippi Organ Recovery Agency (MORA), the tissue donation process depends on effective communication between multiple departments—donor communication, recovery, hospital development, and transplant partners. Despite a strong team culture, it became clear that breakdowns in information sharing and process alignment were affecting overall efficiency and case success. When the Director of Tissue Recovery assumed leadership over the Donor Communications department, a deeper review of our systems revealed several process gaps, including inconsistent internal handoffs and missed opportunities for collaboration. In response, a new initiative was launched to improve communication flow and identify key areas for improvement across the entire referral-to-recovery pathway.

HYPOTHESIS

Bringing recovery and donor communications under unified leadership and implementing collaborative case review processes would reduce communication gaps, improve efficiency across departments, and lead to stronger outcomes for tissue donation cases.

METHODS

To address these challenges, we launched a **weekly cross-departmental case review call**, bringing together members from donor communication, tissue recovery, and leadership. During these calls, each case from the prior week is reviewed in detail to identify both **wins** and **areas of improvement**. This process created a culture of transparency and shared accountability while helping each department understand how their role impacts the larger picture.

Additionally, small but impactful process changes were implemented, including:

1. **Clarified Internal Roles & Expectations** – Reinforcing handoff responsibilities during case transitions.
2. **Increased Collaboration Between Shifts** – Creating a stronger bridge between day and night shift teams.
3. **Real-Time Discussion of Referral Quality** – Analyzing data points like referral timing, accuracy, and completeness.
4. **Highlighting Best Practices** – Recognizing what worked well and replicating success strategies across teams.

RESULTS

Since implementing the weekly case review model and unifying leadership between departments, MORA has seen measurable improvement. Most notably, we achieved our **second highest month ever** for tissue recoveries. Staff across departments report increased clarity, stronger coordination, and more confidence in their role in the donation process. The culture has shifted toward proactive problem-solving, with team members now anticipating challenges and flagging issues before they impact recovery. Anecdotally, the review calls have also strengthened interdepartmental trust and led to improved morale, especially during high-volume weeks.

CONCLUSIONS

Breaking down silos between donor communication and tissue recovery has proven critical to improving donation outcomes. The implementation of weekly case reviews has provided a consistent platform for collaboration, accountability, and shared learning. This initiative demonstrates that administrative improvements—when rooted in teamwork and transparent leadership—can yield tangible success in both operational metrics and team morale. MORA's experience suggests that even longstanding systems benefit from fresh eyes and cross-functional alignment, especially when driven by a common goal: honoring every donor and maximizing every opportunity.

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INTRODUCTION

At MORA, the tissue donation process depends on effective communication between multiple departments. Despite a strong team culture, it became clear that breakdowns in information sharing and process alignment were affecting overall efficiency and case success. When the Director of Tissue Recovery assumed leadership over the donor communications department, a deeper review of our systems revealed several process gaps, including inconsistent internal handoffs and missed opportunities for collaboration. In response, a new initiative was launched to improved communication flow and identify key areas for improvement across the entire referral-to-recovery pathway.

HYPOTHOSIS

If recovery and donor communication were brought under one collaborative structure (conference call)—with shared leadership and real-time case discussions—we believed we could:

- Minimize breakdown points
- Increase efficiency and clarity
- Improve staff morale
- Ultimately, improve donation outcomes

METHODOLOGY

To tackle these challenges, we launched weekly cross-departmental case reviews- bringing together donor communication, tissue recovery, and leadership to review each case, identify wins and gaps, and promote shared accountability and transparency. Small but impactful process changes followed.

- Clarified Internal Roles and Expectations- Reinforcing handoff responsibilities during case transitions.
- Increased Collaboration Between Shifts- Creating a stronger bridge between day and night shift teams.
- Real Time Discussion of Referral Quality- Analyzing data points like referral timing, accuracy, and completeness.
- Highlighting Best Practices- Recognizing what worked well and replicating success strategies across teams.

RESULTS

- Second-highest tissue recovery month ever recorded at MORA
- Departments now report:
 - Better clarity on their roles
 - Increased collaboration
 - More proactive troubleshooting during complex referrals
- Morale has improved, especially in weeks with higher-than-normal volume
- Staff feel more heard, supported, and aligned across shifts
- Trust between departments has deepened, with stronger interdependence

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FIELD

1. Unified Leadership = Unified Outcomes

When communication and recovery teams report to the same leader, they align faster, solve problems sooner, and focus more clearly on donor outcomes. This structural alignment reduces siloed decision-making and fosters mutual accountability.

2. Small Operational Tweaks Can Yield Big Results

Clearer handoffs, shift-bridging strategies, and open feedback loops are low-cost interventions that can significantly boost efficiency and staff morale. These changes are replicable across OPOs, regardless of size.

3. Consistent Feedback Loops Improve Interdepartmental Trust

Departments that normally operate in separate silos (e.g., day vs. night, communications vs. recovery) gain deeper respect for each other’s challenges when they review cases together. Trust leads to better coordination, even in high-stress cases.

4. Family-Centered Care Begins with Internal Communication

Streamlined communication between departments allows donation opportunities to be pursued more efficiently and compassionately—ultimately serving donor families better and honoring each gift.

5. Scalable for Both Tissue and Organ Donation Workflows

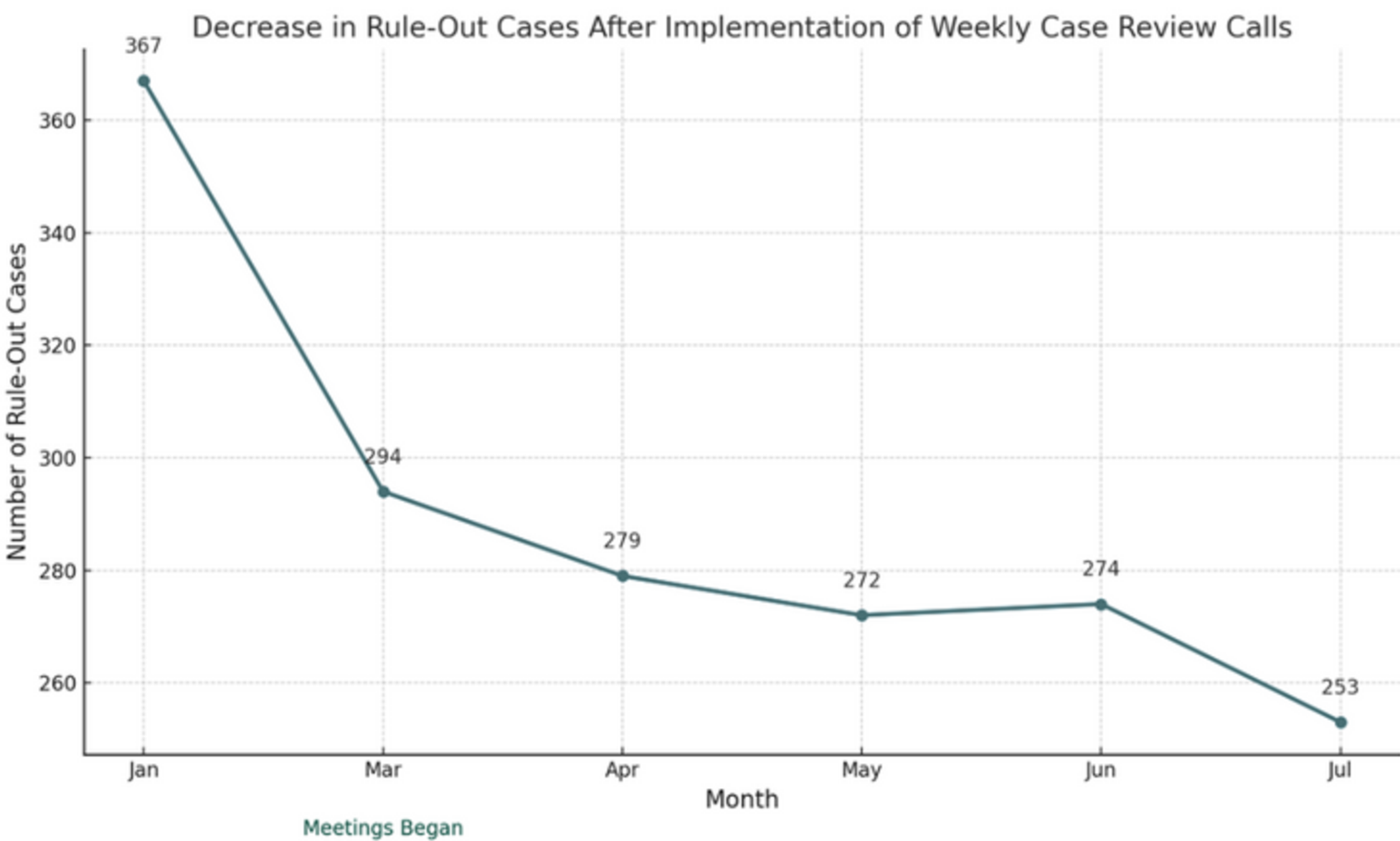
While this initiative focused on tissue recovery, the model could be adapted for organ donation teams. Case reviews, role clarification, and shift-bridging apply to both timelines, especially in high-acuity settings.

6. Elevates the Role of Donor Communication Specialists

This model recognizes donor communication teams as vital clinical collaborators—not just call-takers. Their insight and accuracy have a measurable impact on downstream recovery success.

7. A New Model for Continuous Process Improvement in OPO

Other OPOs seeking to modernize or refine their internal operations can view this as a flexible, people-first framework for process improvement: collaborative, iterative, and deeply donor-centered.



“Now we solve problems together—in real time—not after the fact.”