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Conference Abstract

Promoting Trust and Transparency: a commitment to better care for patients receiving specialist outpatient services in Southern Adelaide

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Abstract

Background: Specialist outpatient services are an important part of the patient's healthcare journey, providing an interface between acute inpatient and primary care. Public outpatient services are delivered within the Southern Adelaide Local Health Network (SALHN) from three acute care hospitals and two GP Plus practices, with 410,000 appointments each year. The SALHN Outpatient in Focus project was commenced in March 2013 to develop efficiency and patient focused strategies.

Practice context: With the necessity to divide available resources in South Australia's health system, outpatient service funding is capped. Based on 2013/14 activity data SALHN outpatient appointments run 12.6% over activity, have 17,000 people on the waiting lists and have experienced a 10-30% increase in referral demand in the last 12-months. Clinicians in both acute and primary care have expressed concerns about availability and transparency of information shared with each other in providing a patient's care.

Problem defined: Through focus group meetings, GPs and hospital specialists have identified their concerns about the current system:

GPs: Understanding the specialist services available and how they are triaged; awareness of waiting times for non-urgent referrals; lack of guidelines for managing non-urgent conditions during the wait period; delay in correspondence from specialists after outpatient appointments

Specialists: Insufficient information on referrals; patients unprepared for appointments; uncertainty of shared care capacity in primary care for patients discharge from specialist care

Objective: Foster cross-sector collaboration with a clinician leadership model within Southern Adelaide outpatient services and address clinician's concerns associated with the availability of transparent information on service provision and patient flow.

Highlights: The following is a summary of key interventions of the Outpatient Reform project:

- GP and Specialists partnered to develop a video that outlines the outpatient reform process. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ZzqWZHxDqs>

- Provision of waiting time information to GPs, based on specialty, to enable non-urgent management to continue in primary care
- Development and on-line publication of service descriptions, triage criteria, referral requirements and condition management guidelines in 32 clinical specialties. <http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/SALHNoutpatients>. Provision of this information has resulted in some surprising changes to patient referral patterns, whereby we have already used this data to inform future service planning.
- GP education sessions (delivered by hospital specialists, in partnership with the Medicare Local) to address knowledge gaps in particular therapeutic areas. Release of GP and practice referral patterns to GPs and specialists within the area to build awareness, highlight opportunities and better understand demand drivers.
- Reviewed and implemented strategies to address the delay in written communication from specialists to GPs after outpatient appointments (reduction from average 45 days to under 14 days)

Conclusion: The Outpatient in Focus strategy has been designed around building partnerships between clinicians and the supporting institutions across the continuum of patient care. The key vehicles to facilitate this have been increased communication, transparency of information and timely availability of data. The results of this approach include enhanced clinician accountability and leadership in outpatient service provision and an ability to apply commissioning principals to hospital service planning that consider the health system as a whole.

Keywords

collaboration; communication; clinician; outpatients; trust

PowerPoint presentation

https://www.conftool.net/integratedcare2014/index.php?page=downloadPaper&form_id=118
