

## Editorial

# Process Mapping: A Service Improvement Tool

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The National Health Service paper; Quality, Improvement, Productivity and Prevention [1] suggests that by using quality indicators clinicians can identify where change is needed to bring about improved, higher quality personalised care. Understanding the patient journey by process mapping is considered to be an extremely useful diagnostic tool to identify areas in need of improvement and reworking [2]. Furthermore it allows service providers to fully understand the process from the patient's perspective, this is essential if patient focussed service improvements are to be identified and made [2].

When process mapping it is imperative that there is clear definition of the goal trying to be achieved and that the scope of the process has been explored and identified [2]. The scope of the process mapping is to inform service evaluation in order to improve patient experience and service workability for staff by recommending process improvements to provide a more prompt, efficient and effective service. In order to inform any service redesign, demand, capacity, activity and queue management together with measurement of demand, capacity, activity and backlog needs to be process mapped [2].

Health care professionals must consider the wider social and familial needs of their patients [3]. This fits the ethical leadership criteria suggested by the NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement Leadership Qualities Framework in that the focus is in the interest of patients and promotes safety [4]. It demonstrates accountability and conscientiousness through honesty and integrity by working towards improvements in the quality of care [4]. The patient process flow mapping involves the examination of the steps of the process each patient experiences and the information is used to evaluate the service performance (Figure 1). It is essential that the processes involved in the series of steps or actions which take place are understood if we are to find areas in need of service improvement and ways in which this may be achieved [2]. The results of the service evaluation will help to produce internal recommendations for improvements and inform policy at a local organisational level [5].

Service redesign, driven by the process mapping is beneficial in terms of improving staff morale in the health care setting as the processes become more appropriate, succinct and efficient, making working life easier for the staff providing care. When staff find their

working environment to be a more workable environment and have adequate support mechanisms in place to help enhance the service provision it will be beneficial to both staff and patients in terms of satisfaction. This is an area identified in the NHS Quality Innovation Productivity and Prevention paper which suggests that improved systems and processes which make it easier for staff to carry out their jobs is indeed a positive improvement through change [1].

Process mapping involves two stages, the first being to understand what occurs during the process, who is involved and where it happens. The second is to examine the process; this will determine where problems such as 'hand offs', waiting time and duplication etc. occur. This will then help to identify opportunities for improvement and service development and inform the measures needed to improve the service [6,2]. Once one has understood the journey from the patients view point the next stage is to examine the process and identify areas where problems occur such a bottle-necking of patients or areas within the process which are unnecessary, duplicated, or are of little value. Identification of queues created in the flow or other areas of concern which could function better if some changes were made to the process.

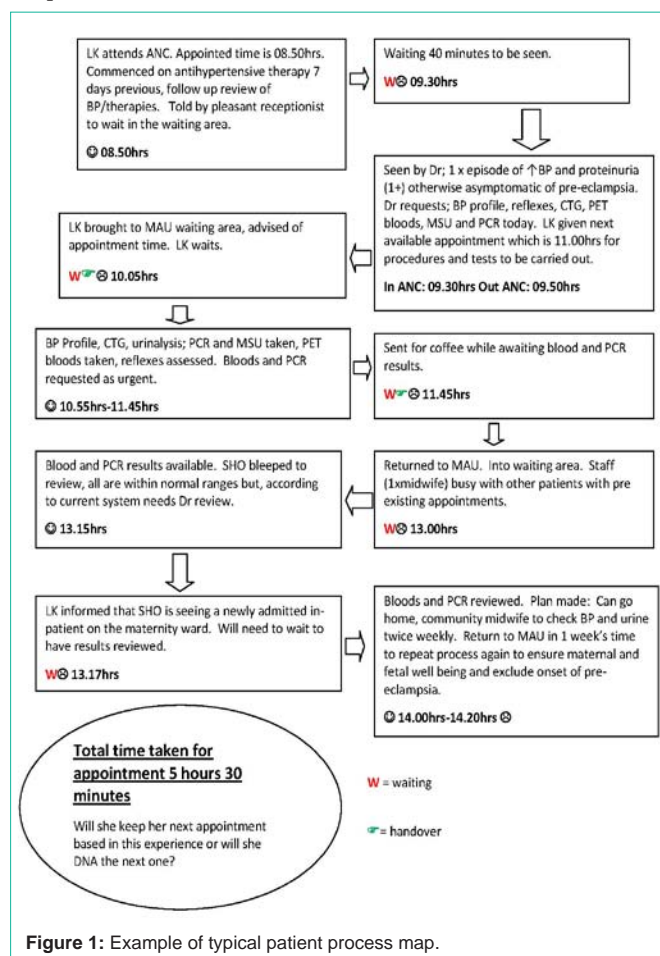


Figure 1: Example of typical patient process map.

Careful consideration of evidence based, streamlined care management is imperative. Ensuring patient centred care that is managed and delivered in a constructive and favourable way may have wider reaching consequences which may contribute to a better, safer and more personally satisfying experience for patients and staff alike [7]. It is imperative that intellectual and clinical competencies are important in health care but it is often the interpersonal and communication skills which make the difference when considering patient's experiences and memories of an experiment in a health care environment [8].

Improved staff satisfaction and morale within health care settings by ensuring that it is easier to carry out tasks in a timely manner overall addresses the new NHS reform and budget by reducing patient time in hospital and provision of better, more streamlined services with a possible reduction in DNA's, inappropriate referrals and hospital admissions [9]. With the customer based system currently operating in the NHS foundation trusts it is essential that a high quality, patient centred service is provided to ensure the local population use the hospital and are not tempted to get health provision from other hospitals in the area which will decrease patient numbers, having a negative financial impact. In addition, promotion and improvement of high quality care and efficiency driven by service redesign is the main government initiative being instigated by the introduction of the QIPP programme [1,10].

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