Background and challenges

Lung cancer treatments and regimes are becoming more complex, and the increase in demand for follow up appointments meant the service capacity of an NHS University Hospital had become overloaded and waiting times had escalated. There appeared to be a mismatch between clinical capacity and the number of patients booked into clinics. As a result, staff were unsatisfied and overworked, yet an absence of clinic data and follow up protocols meant there was little evidence to demonstrate capacity issues. Patients were not always getting the most appropriate lung cancer follow up, and the skills of the Lung Cancer Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNS) were not being utilized to their full potential. There was a need to develop a stronger sense of organizational control and increased efficiency for patients. In order for the lung cancer team to meet the increase in demand and continue to deliver a quality service, a redesign of the patient care pathway was required.

Aims and objectives

The primary aim was to reduce patient numbers in the follow-up clinic and create a more sustainable service. A number of objectives were set out to achieve this aim:

1. Gather data to provide evidence regarding the mismatch between clinical capacity and the number of clinic follow up appointments.
2. Engage all stakeholders in the development of service improvements.
3. Explore the introduction of alternative follow up options for patients.
4. Develop and publish protocols and guidelines.
5. Map out a new pathway to be delivered within existing resources.
6. Gather and analyze patient feedback.
Addressing the challenges

A 10-month project plan was created and individuals were identified to make up the core project team, including: sponsors and clinicians, CNS, managers, and biopharma.

Project team
An insights workshop addressed the discontent within the team. This encouraged staff to discuss issues and understand individual personalities and communication styles. Placing staff on a ‘team wheel’ according to their skills allowed them to identify decision-makers to call upon to support the implementation of change.

Information gathering
Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with a wide range of stakeholders to gather perspectives on existing barriers to service delivery and ideas for improvements. Common insights identified as achievable were: risk assessment of patients and holistic needs assessment, nurse-led follow up clinics, telephone-based follow ups, and patient feedback.

Analysis of follow up appointments
Raw numbers of patient-booked appointments were obtained and patterns of booking and time slot allocations analyzed. The capacity of the follow up clinic was also analyzed and compared with demand.

Patient feedback
Patient surveys around the follow up service and CNS team were conducted to help determine priority areas for change.

Pathway development and workshop
A workshop united professionals from the hospital, community palliative care, and primary care to review evidence around clinic capacity, patient flow and stratification. Using these outputs, a fully mapped care pathway was developed.

Protocols and guidelines
Flow diagrams and role profiles were used to implement new pathway and nurse-led clinic protocols.

“"This initiative has made us all think about the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of the service that we provide, and has placed the patients’ needs and experience at the very center of what we do."" - Directorate manager, medicine scheduled pathways
Outcomes

• Project board meetings and team reviews resulted in successful sharing of ideas and effective joint decision-making.

• Open and honest sharing at the insights workshop obtained positive feedback around collaboration and communication, boosting staff morale.

Analysis of follow up appointments

• Data analysis proved that clinics were running over because the demand for face-to-face follow up appointments was outstripping capacity.

• Data supported the fact that 20% of follow up patients would need to follow an alternative pathway if demand and capacity were to be matched.

Pathway and services

• Appropriate patients were filtered through alternative methods of follow up, dependent on risk factors such as treatment side effects.

• Nurse-led follow up was introduced for post-radical radiotherapy and post surgery patients. These clinics utilized the skills of the Lung Cancer CNS and freed up time for the oncology consultant to see patients requiring consultant-led follow up appointments.

• A formal telephone clinic was established, into which patients could be referred and given an appointment time.

Patient feedback

• Patient involvement was vital to the success of the project.

• Analysis of patient feedback regarding the CNS team showed that patients were very satisfied with the service, however waiting times were the main area requiring improvement.

• Formalized telephone follow up clinics were implemented after 60% of patients said that they would be happy to receive consultations over the telephone.

• The team were quickly able to action patient requests for a water dispenser in the waiting area.

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Recommendations

Recommendations for improving the service further were put forward. Yearly reviewing of protocols was suggested, along with the creation of a document register for pathways and protocols. A post-project questionnaire was recommended, alongside a poster to feedback to patients the results of their completed questionnaires and the actions taken.

A comprehensive survivorship programme was suggested and implemented prior to completion of the project, alongside the introduction of a tool to measure patients’ holistic needs. Training for nurses to allow contingency planning and cover for nurse-led clinics was recommended and implemented prior to project completion.

Finally, patient inclusion was recommended for future workshop activity in order to gain ‘small wins’ and access valuable insight for improving their experience.

The project:
1. Established baseline data and evidence required
2. Produced protocols, patient maps and flowcharts
3. Implemented nurse-led clinics
4. Improved team communication and collaboration

The team has been thoroughly professional and handled the NHS team very well… even the senior stakeholders of the project are impressed. We shall be celebrating at the end of the year I am sure, and our company’s credibility and reputation, once again, will be first class.

- Top 10 pharma account manager

About Quintiles

Quintiles (NYSE: Q), a Fortune 500 company, is the world’s largest provider of biopharmaceutical development and commercial outsourcing services. With a network of more than 32,000 employees conducting business in more than 100 countries, we helped develop or commercialize all of 2013’s top 100 best-selling drugs on the market. Quintiles applies the breadth and depth of our service offerings along with extensive therapeutic, scientific and analytics expertise to help our customers navigate an increasingly complex healthcare environment as they seek to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of better healthcare outcomes. To learn more about Quintiles, please visit www.quintiles.com

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