



# The Patient Flow Collaborative

## GOOD NEWS STORY

### Improving management systems

### Using annual leave tracking to deliver scheduled and routine outpatients services

Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre

#### What was the problem?

The Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre delivers 130 outpatient clinics per week, conducted by 140 clinicians. Every week approximately 1100 patients attend the outpatients department.

It was estimated that up 50% of leave applications by Clinicians did not include notification to the Outpatients department. As a result high level activity was required to either urgently notify patients affected, or fit patients into other schedules that would increase clinician workloads. This work practice often had a huge impact on patients, particularly rural patients, on clinicians who were obliged to see other patients and the booking clerks who had to re-schedule patients into new appointments.

Without a planned and timely management system for recording, monitoring and measuring clinician leave, unnecessary delays in patient care can be expected, diverting resources from patient care.

#### How was the problem identified?

For the Booking Clerks in Outpatients, disruptions due to un-notified leave by Clinicians was an ongoing problem. However the clerks did not feel they had the authority to tackle the problem.

Bill Davidson, the Business Support Coordinator for Ambulatory Care at Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, sought to address the problem without generating additional work for clinicians and the Booking Clerks.

Bill developed a Clinic Amendment Form to notify leave dates and required actions. The electronic form is attachable to email and completed by the clinician or secretary and emailed to Outpatient Appointments. Notifying by email is far more effective than the internal mail system that can take multiple days to send and receive mail.

A tracking system was also developed to show the date of receipt (by Outpatient Appointments) of advice from doctor. The tracker calculates the interval between receipt and date requested for action.

As Bill states "people often wait for wiz bang solutions to fix the problem, when its not really required. When we looked at the problem, we knew it was about improving communication – and we could do this easily."

# People often wait for wiz bang solutions to fix the problem, when its not really required.

## Business Support Coordinator

### Who was involved in developing the change idea?

Bill Davidson developed the tools and worked with Booking Clerks to ensure they met their needs. The work was also strongly endorsed by the Outpatient's Nurse Manager and divisional General Managers who have taken a strong interest in the monthly data generated from the tracking system.

A range of benchmarks were set to accompany the tools. For example a requirement for a minimum of 10 working days to send the *Clinic Amendment Form*. The response rate is now captured in the tracker, used as a KPI and forwarded monthly to the Outpatient's Nurse Manager and divisional General Managers.

### How have patients benefited?

While there is no data collected on patient cancellations, there has been a significant improvement in the response rate from clinicians in the notification of changes to Outpatient appointments. This improved response has enabled the Booking Clerks to reschedule Outpatient appointment, when required, in a planned and timely manner, which is particularly important for rural patients and patients with conflicting demands.

### Is the improvement sustainable?

The improvement is sustainable because it addressed a significant problem through a simple innovation. It has significantly improved work processes for staff and clinicians and enabled them to deliver better patient care. The tools underpinning the innovation are user friendly, with training provided to a small number to ensure confidence in their use. The Outpatient's Nurse Manager is better placed to match capacity to demand and therefore use hospital resources more effectively. In addition, the divisional General Managers have supported the introduction and on-going maintenance of the improvement, incorporating the results into KPI targets.

### Were there any unexpected benefits?

As with most solutions that hit the target, all stakeholders now have greater confidence in the system to manage annual leave. Clinicians know what to do within the expected timelines and Booking Clerks are feeling empowered and demonstrating greater ownership of their role.

### Further information

[www.health.vic.gov.au/patientflow](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/patientflow)

### Or contact

**Clinical Innovation Agency**  
Office of the Chief Clinical Advisor  
Department of Human Services  
**Tel:** 9616 7859  
**Fax:** 9616 6945

