



The Patient Flow Collaborative

GOOD NEWS STORY

Improving management systems Moving towards a 'pull' system through improved bed management **The Royal Children's Hospital**

What was the problem?

A characteristic of large, complex organisations is often a 'silo' approach to work organisation; smaller units (or wards) are geared to work independently and aim to achieve local results. While most health practitioners would agree a 'whole-systems' approach is relevant and useful in decision-making, in reality it can be difficult to foster.

Good bed management is the key principle to efficient patient flow management. However, an effective bed management system can only truly operate if it takes a whole of system approach and accounts for all beds within the health service. The management of The Royal Children's Hospital wanted to improve bed management practices, but was lacking an effective mechanism to manage the process using a whole-system approach.

A whole system approach to bed management will smooth the mismatch between capacity and demand in a timely manner. Virtually all hospitals can attest to the staff resources that are wasted frantically searching for inpatient beds, let alone the delays and impact on patient care. As The Royal Children's Hospital accept all emergency presentations, management wanted to develop a system that could better predict and manage bed requirements in order to deliver an improved standard of care for all patients.

How was the problem identified?

Whilst there had been goodwill and an intention to undertake systematic bed management, without the proper staffing resources, the task was not achieved. The Patient Flow Collaborative provided an impetus to resource a team to develop and implement a whole-system bed management system.

What was the change idea? Who was involved?

The Access Manager, Trevor Rixon, initiated the development and implementation of an Access Management Team to coordinate and manage patient access to the hospital and its resources. The Access Management Team currently comprises the Access Manager, Admissions Manager and Bed Allocations Officers. It is planned for other key staff, such as the After Hours Hospital Coordinators to become part of the team. At the beginning, the aims for bed management improvements were articulated, these were to:

- improve the overall patient experience
- collect accurate and timely bed management information
- identify and remove barriers to good bed management practices
- provide a mechanism to manage daily fluctuations in activity
- engage The Royal Children's Hospital community in the improvement process.

The Bed Management meeting is the most incredibly useful and efficient way of planning the hospital's day, sorting admissions, discharges, transfers and staffing needs. There is clearly the potential for smoothing ebbs and flows in elective admissions using this mechanism.

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To date, the above aims are being achieved via a daily Bed Management Meeting that was implemented in early August 2004. The meeting is held at 0930 each weekday and is attended by Nurse Unit Managers, Associate Nurse Unit Managers, Bed Allocation staff and senior management. A representative from each clinical area attends the meetings.

Bed data is collected using an electronic tool, which sorts and calculates daily bed requirements, predicted discharges and staffing needs. A 'traffic light' system is used to provide a bed management 'snapshot' of each area. Decisions are then made which reflect the anticipated emergency and elective demand for beds, the available capacity and nursing staffing profile.

With key staff present, the meeting is successful because it resolves complex, whole system bed management issues in an effective and efficient 20-minute meeting. In addition, the face-to-face meetings have built better camaraderie and rapport between colleagues and across units. This alone has resulted in a more responsive approach to meeting patients' needs. Staff are demonstrating a whole system view to bed management and adopting a 'pull' approach to create capacity. Recently, a seriously ill child received optimum care because four wards 'pulled' patients, freeing up the required capacity and working together to ensure the right patients were in the right beds. For many participants this situation truly highlighted the benefits of an effective bed management system.

How have patients benefited?

The Royal Children's Hospital is demonstrating that the hospital which manages capacity and demand through rigorous bed management practices is well placed to provide timely and effective care to meet patient and community expectations.

Is the improvement sustainable?

The management of The Royal Children's Hospital believe they have achieved improvements to patient care through improved bed management practices. The underlying key to their success has been to take a collaborative approach with ward and unit staff working together with senior management support. The data collection tool is constantly refined so it delivers whole system data and captures the 'right' information. Staff feedback is being sought through a structured survey and the results will inform future changes. Trevor and the team are constantly looking at ways to continue building and improving the daily bed management process to assist staff to continue to provide quality patient care. Senior medical staff are also becoming more involved in the process. This is vital if the benefits of the system are to be both maintained and enhanced.

Were there any unexpected benefits?

Unit Managers, their staff and bed allocation staff state that the 20 minute daily meeting has significantly improved communication and professional relationships across the hospital. A significant outcome for many staff has been a decrease in the stress that poor bed management often brings. It is also hoped that this approach will lead to a better understanding of bed management and improved practices to achieve a more efficient patient discharge process.

Further information or copies of the Bed Management tool

www.health.vic.gov.au/patientflow

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