



# **NHS Tayside - Community Physiotherapy Service Case Study**

“waiting times reduced from 14 plus weeks to a maximum of 2 weeks ”

**Vanguard Scotland**



### **The Issues:**

- The seasonally adjusted waiting time to get a Community Physiotherapy appointment in the NHS Tayside region was 14 weeks and increasing.
- Year on year, demand for the service was increasing.
- The Community Physiotherapy Department was required to make a 3% financial saving.
- 15% of the department's resources were required to undertake new work.

### **The main challenges for the system were:**

- High level of patients who did not show for appointments (DNA)
- Referral information not coming in "clean" from GPs
- A lack of resources to deal with demand and high levels of "failure" demand as patients phoned in to chase referrals

### **The solutions they had already tried unsuccessfully:**

A number of traditional solutions had already been implemented to tackle these problems.

NHS Tayside's efforts to identify the reasons for patient DNAs had reduced them to just over 10%, but the solutions consumed resources and added lots of time to issuing the appointments.

A number of guidance notes and training sessions had been offered to GPs but there was no improvement in referral information.

Triage had been introduced to speed up urgent patients, but due to insufficient information triage was often performed twice to get it right. This used up yet more of the thinly stretched physiotherapy resource, slowed the appointment process by up to 3 working days. 20% of patients subsequently classified as urgent were not and 15% patients classified non urgent were urgent.

The "solutions" had consumed more resources, introduced errors and become a part of the problem.

Clearly a different approach was required to achieve performance improvement.



## **A Systems Solution:**

A team comprising of staff from the Community Physiotherapy Service with the assistance of the Tayside Clinical Governance team carried out a systems review of the assessment process using Vanguard's Systems Thinking Methodology for performance improvement.

Following this assessment an experiment was carried out using 14% of the overall physiotherapy resources (these resources dealt with 26.9% of overall demand).

Physiotherapists spent time with GPs in the experimental practices to understand the problems they had with referrals. New methods for referral were trialled with astonishing results. Work was reduced through cutting out "wasteful" practices and re-designing process flows.

## **The Results:**

- Demand in the experimental practices was successfully reduced by 45%
- Patients not showing up (DNAs) for first appointments were almost eliminated
- Patient waiting times reduced from 14 plus weeks to a maximum of 2 weeks
- Finally, 3 Physiotherapists (10% of resources) were released to take on work which had been sitting on a development list awaiting funding.

Patients, GPs and Physiotherapists all loved the new system and are helping the Clinical Governance Team and the Community Physiotherapy Team implement the new system in the remaining practices.

*"As a result of using Vanguard's Methods, our client waiting time to see a physiotherapist went from 14 weeks to 4 days. If you want a dramatic improvement in performance, this is it".*

**Jim Duffy, NHS Tayside**

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