Streamlining the Referral Process for Singapore General Hospital (SGH) Patients Referred to Community Hospitals (CH)

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SingHealth

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Introduction

Singapore General Hospital (SGH) is the largest tertiary acute hospital in Singapore, with more than 3000 referrals to Community Hospitals annually. On average, patients transferring to Community Hospitals will stay in SGH for 19.1 days, with 7.6 days due to the lengthy referral process. Referral turnaround time is crucial as it affects our patients' access to the next level of care. Delays lead to prolonged stays in SGH, and deny other acute patients of inpatient beds, which may lead to undesirable outcomes.

Objectives

Our aim is to reduce the time taken for referrals from SGH to Community Hospitals from **19.1 days** to **15 days**, enabling our patients' timely transfer to the next appropriate level of care.

Methodology

Value Stream Map (VSM): A multi-disciplinary team consisting of stakeholders involved in each stage of a patient's referral process was formed and a VSM of the current process was created.

Ideal Process Map: With the goal to eliminate non-value-added processes, the ideal process map was then created.

Gap Analysis: Comparing the current VSM with the ideal process map, we identified gaps that prevented smooth transfers of patients.

Gaps Identified

Variation
Varying practices of submission of a referral onto the Integrated Referral Management System (IRMS)

Incompleteness of Referral
Multiple queries from Community Hospitals due to inappropriate/incomplete referrals

Various Points of Contact
Miscommunication occurs due to service providers liaising with multiple members of the care team

Ownership
Lack of central oversight of referrals leading to delays

Patient-CH Mismatch
Every Community Hospital have different care capabilities and varied facilities

Multiple Inputs Required
Inputs from various healthcare professionals required for the referral process to be completed

Delays in Patient's Transition to the Next Level of Care

Initiatives

A Community Hospital Referral Team (CHRT) was formed to provide oversight for the entire referral process for all patients to be discharged from SGH to Community Hospitals. The responsibilities of CHRT consist of both clinical and operational aspects, both of which are equally important in ensuring the prompt transfer of patients.

Clinical

Key Responsibilities
- Reviewing all draft referrals put up on the Integrated Referral Management System (IRMS) by the primary care team for appropriateness, completeness as well as timeliness
- Acting as a central point of contact for the primary care team, Community Hospitals as well as patients and their family
- Load-balancing of referrals to all Community Hospitals

Operational

Key Responsibilities
- Acting as a central point of contact for the primary care team, Community Hospitals as well as patients and their family
- Providing basic financial and means testing information
- Working closely with all Community Hospitals to optimize the timeliness of the transfer

Results Achieved

Outcome Measures	Control Data	Pilot Data
Length of Stay	12.5 days	11.2 days
Time from First Submission of Referral to Patient Discharge	7.1 days	5.2 days
Time for Queries to be Answered	4.3 days	1.8 days
Number of Queries	1.2	1.0

Results from the pilot study showed that the referrals were more complete, leading to a reduction in queries from Community Hospitals. In addition, the queries were responded to more promptly, resulting in a **reduction in the referral turnaround time**, which may lead to a shorter length of stay for patients.

Conclusion

The CHRT has shown great promise, with the potential to save SGH up to **4,200 bed days** annually, which will enable an additional **700 admissions** for more acute patients. From February 2018, the CHRT has been fully implemented across all SGH Inpatient Wards. The CHRT will continue to work closely with all Community Hospitals in Singapore to streamline the processes and improve the communication flow, so that the referral process can be shortened even further.

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