



# Standardize Specialist Outpatient Clinic (SOC) appointment booking process and improve information flow



Stacy Leong, National University Hospital  
Janet De Silva, National University Hospital  
Perrine Lee, National University Hospital

## BACKGROUND

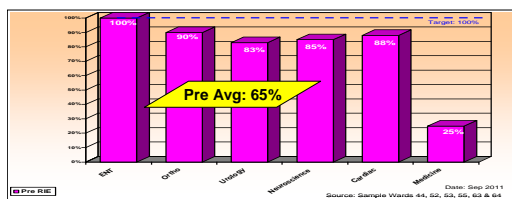
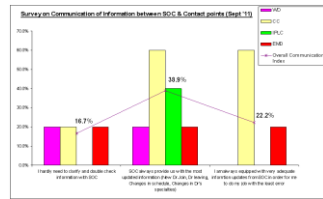
The unique schedules and operational needs of 33 Specialist Outpatient Clinics (SOC) and centres made appointment booking at the various contact points complicated. The contact points responsible for making SOC appointment are Call Centre (CC), 37 inpatient wards, Emergency Medicine Department (EMD) and International Liaison Patient Centre (IPLC).

Only 40% of the inpatients were able to obtain their appointment upon discharge, and the rest would have to wait from 2 days to 7 days before an appointment was obtained. An average of 10 complaints arose related to untimely responses every month.

88% of SOC staff and 67% of Wards, CC, EMD and IPLC had low staff morale related to appointment booking (figure 1). Only 65% of our patients were able to obtain their SOC appointment within 2 working days (figure 2).

Figure 1: Survey on Communication and Information flow

Figure 2: Percentage of Appointment Requests Closed Within 2 Working Days

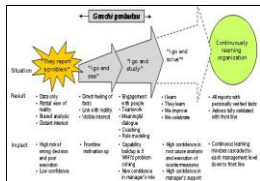


## OBJECTIVES

1. Streamlining and standardising SOC appointment booking process in Call Centre.
2. Standardizing the communication process and channel to achieve a more coordinated and smoother information flow.

## METHODOLOGY

The approaches which were adopted to address long turnaround time to obtain an appointment and uncoordinated information dissemination are as follows:

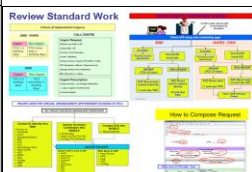
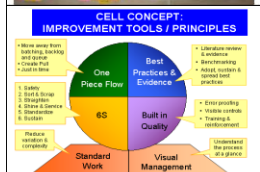
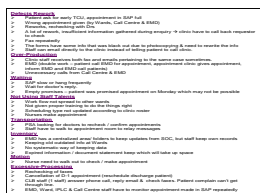


Genchi Genbutsu (Go and See) session was organised to bring the team down to the front line where the phenomena is happening.

Succeeding the Go and See session was the DOWNTIME exercise. Wastes captured during the observations and through their experiences were mapped into the 8 categories of wastes.

Paradigm breaking exercise helped the team think out of the box to come up with breakthrough solutions.

Gap Analysis of the underlying systems and processes.



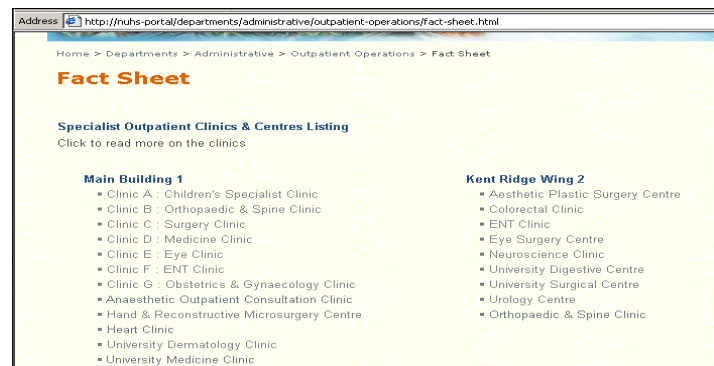
Principles in Cell Concept provided a systematic approach to resolve the issues.

PDCA cycle was applied to solve problem systematically and monitor progress of the project

## IMPLEMENTATION

1. An Outpatient Operations website on the intranet (figure 3) was created to display the clinics' schedule, clinic staff contact numbers and recipe cards. SOC information has now become easily accessible to all departments, and timelier update of information by SOC is achieved.

Figure 3: Outpatient Operations Website was created on the Intranet



2. Appointment booking training sessions were conducted to equip all ward clerks with the skills to interpret the clinics schedules and book appointments directly in the SAP system.
3. Email accounts were created for the 37 wards to replace faxing and calling. Late or missed requests associated with faxes were totally eliminated. Time spent on waiting for clinics to pick up their phone calls reduced significantly.
4. The team leader conducted a few rounds of presentations and dialogue sessions in Outpatient Clinic Managers meeting and Ward Clerks meeting.

## RESULTS

1. Improved patients' experience  
→ Patients' appointment requests closed within 2 working days improved from 65% to 90% (figure 4).  
→ Complaints related to appointment booking reduced by 90%, from an average of 10 cases to 1 case per month (figure 5).

Figure 4: Percentage of Appointment Requests Closed Within 2 Working Days.

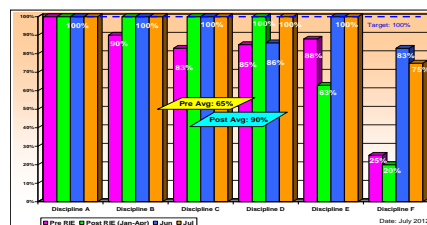
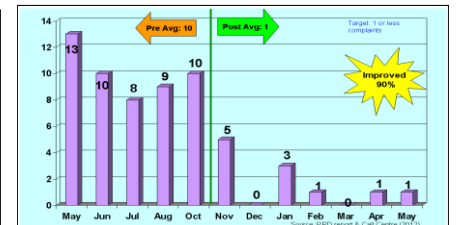


Figure 5: Number of Complaints



2. Reduced logistical inefficiencies  
→ Total elimination of fax correspondences to and fro various contact points.  
→ Email correspondences from SOC to Call Centre reduced by 46%, from an average of 87 to 44 per month.
3. Better coordination among contact points  
→ 100% of the SOC's update their clinics schedule in a timely manner (from a baseline of 17%)

## SUSTAINING THE GAINS & LESSONS LEARNT

### Sustainability

1. Regular review process to follow-up on the progress, challenges, and collate results.
2. Engaging staff to provide feedback on a regular basis.
3. Concerns and challenges faced were addressed promptly.

### Key Success Factors:

1. Clear direction towards patient centric solutions.
2. Good representation of key stakeholders.
3. Effective use of continuous improvement methodology.