

THE JOURNAL OF THE IRISH HEAD AND NECK SOCIETY

Title: Application of Lean Six Sigma leads to improvements in Head and Neck Cancer services

Body: Background

Head & Neck Cancer Services were struggling with labour intensive processes along with heavy clinical workloads making it difficult to provide timely access for patients. We utilised the Lean Six Sigma methodology to facilitate systematic identification and removal of Non-Value-Add activities, significantly improving processes and outcomes for patients and staff.

Methods

The Lean Six Sigma methodology was applied to carry out a full system review. A period of data collection, process mapping, stakeholder interviews and structured observation visits was undertaken. A week-long 'value Stream Analysis' event was performed and a collaborative road map for change was developed. Structured process improvements were implemented in areas such as triage, outpatient clinic scheduling and out coming, testing new patient pathways and theatre scheduling.

Results

Structured mechanisms such as the post clinic huddle lead to an increased discharge rate, increasing new appointment slots by 73%. Average time from referral received to triage reduced from 7.3 days to 2.8 days. Scheduling points for theatre were reduced from 17 steps to 5.

Conclusion

Application of process improvement initiatives have positive implications in a healthcare setting. The effects of these processes are positive for patient wait time, access to services and ultimately patient care.

Authors: Eric Farrell¹, Michelle McGuirk², Shauna Hurley¹, Tom Moran¹ and Fergal O'Duffy¹

Affiliations: 1. Mater University Hospital, Department of ORL HNS 2. Mater Transformation Office