

Utilising Lean Six Sigma at Taunton POAC to Improve Patient Experience and to Reduce Day of Surgery Cancellations

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Introduction

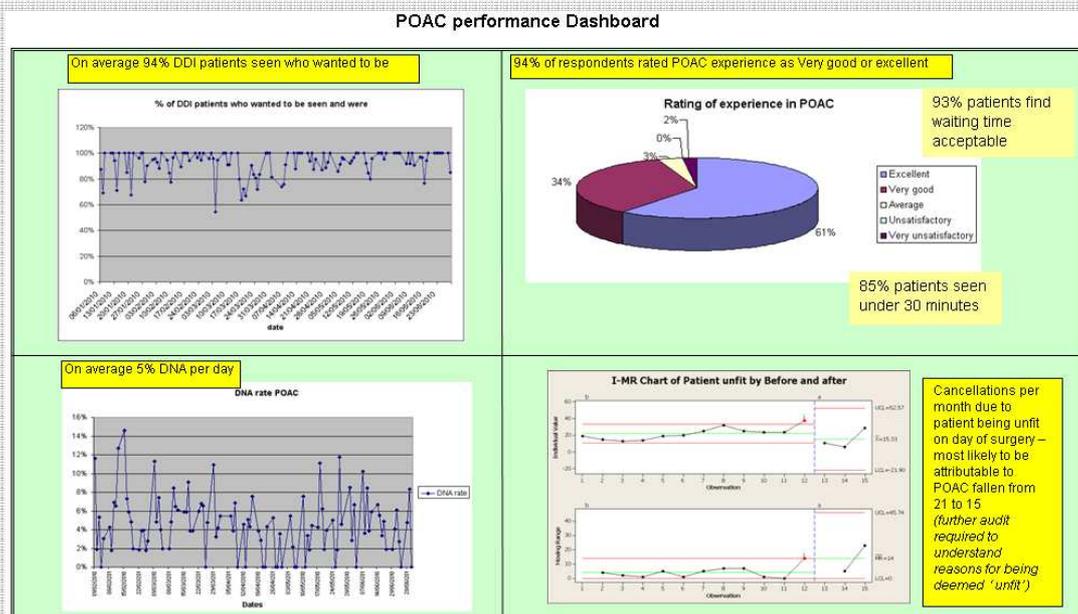
Taunton NHS Trust had identified the PreOperative Assessment Clinic and its processes as a critical area in reducing the risk of day of surgery cancellations. The numbers of patients being deemed 'Unfit' for surgery on day of surgery was perceived as being too high as were the associated costs. The Trust decided to process map the patient journey to understand the critical factors affecting this. 3M supported this process using Lean Six Sigma methodology.

Methods

Lean Six Sigma was adopted to map the current process from GP referral to the patient leaving the Pre-Operative Assessment Clinic with a date for surgery. Critical process steps were identified along with key success factors. A survey gathered feedback from patients as to their experiences during their time in the Clinic and where they placed most value. Root cause analysis highlighted five key elements to investigate; Booking of patients, further investigation tracking, patient assessment techniques, Anaesthetist notes on patient documentation and special instructions. These formed the basis of the improvement plan to reduce day of surgery cancellations.

Results

As part of the process the staff from POAC, Admissions and Theatres were engaged in a Visioning exercise to understand what a perfect day looks like, as well uncovering barriers to achieving this. This brought the team together to highlight 'quick wins' for improving the patient and staff experience, such as improved patient communication and resource availability. The patient survey indicated 94% of respondents rating their POAC experience as Very good or excellent, with 84% seen in under 30 minutes. A new process has been established for tracking referrals leaving POAC for further investigation, a pilot telephone POAC has been set up for ASA1 gynae patients and a proactive call process is being established for suspected high risk DNA's. To date the average day of surgery cancellations due to 'Unfit Patients' has fallen from an average of 21 to 15. Key performance indicators of patient satisfaction, day of surgery cancellations due to POAC, % of drop-ins who wanted a drop in and DNA rates are now being tracked on a monthly 'POAC Health' dashboard.



Discussion

Understanding patient perceptions of value is crucial to the pre-operative assessment process as this can significantly alter day of surgery cancellations. Before the project began it was perceived that patient waiting times was the biggest source of frustration. The survey showed that patients actually placed more value on quality of information on their procedure, and day of surgery details. Waiting times only factored if communication on anticipated times was poor. Risk of day of surgery cancellations can be mitigated through strong communication links between departments and DNAs can be impacted by identifying at risk groups and proactively contacting them before the planned surgery to allay fears. The use of Lean and Six Sigma methodologies can provide a structure for process improvement that is supported by robust data.