

Using a data tally tool to understand call volume and reduce prescription related enquiries

The Challenge

The increasing volume and complexity of work remains one of the most demanding aspects of general practice. A general practice in the west coast of Scotland worked with Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS) to understand and manage administrative demand. They focused on telephone enquiries, so that capacity could be used effectively across the practice team.

Understanding the System

The practice started by looking at the administrative team's workload and demand to understand where time was being spent. They looked at whether there was capacity to take on tasks currently undertaken by GPs (for example, actioning clinic letters). To do this, they needed a clearer picture of what was driving incoming contact.

The practice used a simple, manual data tally tool to capture the volume and reasons for calls handled by the administrative team. Over a five-day period, team members recorded the number of calls and the reason for contact. The results showed that prescription-related enquiries were the single biggest driver of demand (201 of 595 calls). Many of the calls were from patients checking the status of repeat prescriptions. This finding helped the practice to prioritise prescription enquiries as the first area for change.

Aim

The team aimed to reduce prescription-related phone calls by giving clearer, consistent information to patients. They planned to use the practice's new telephone system to provide signposting messages and to monitor changes in call volume over time.

Activity

The practice installed a new cloud-based telephone system. As well as managing calls, this system provided real-time information on call volumes and waiting times. It allowed the practice to add recorded messages to guide patients to the right information or route.

The team used the telephone system to add a recorded message advising patients to allow 48 hours before contacting the practice about their prescription. They then used the telephone system's call

reporting data (over a comparable five-day period) to assess whether overall call volume (number of calls managed by the administrative team) and prescription-related enquiries reduced.

Impact

Using call data from the telephone system, the practice saw a reduction in overall call volume (from 595 to 369) and fewer prescription enquiries (from 201 to 105) over a five-day period after the recorded message was added.

The practice manager added:

'I think for our patients, the telephone system provided better information to them. It's helping address their needs using signposting'.

Key Learnings

- Small-scale changes such as adding a message to the phone system can support the reduction of unnecessary workload and improve communication with patients.
- Use of quality improvement tools such as the data tally tool has helped the team better understand how to meet the needs of their patients, while also empowering the practice team.

'It's given our team useful learning opportunities, they're now aware of quality improvement tools and I am hopeful it's ignited a fire amongst the team to want to learn more about quality improvement in the future.' (Practice manager)

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