Healthcare Improvement Scotland

# Workflow optimisation toolkit

## What is workflow optimisation?

Workflow optimisation, also known as document management, is a process designed to support seamless management of incoming correspondence, primarily at the point of the administration team.

Workflow Optimisation ensures processes are in place so that clinical correspondence can be dealt with by trained administrative staff in a timely, safe and efficient way, and supports the development of practice administrative staff roles.

## Why workflow optimisation?

By managing correspondence in a safe and efficient manner, the number of documents requiring GP involvement can be reduced - resulting in releasing GP time to focus on their Expert Medical Generalist role.

Practice administrative staff and practice manager roles can be supported to develop and extend skills such as quality improvement and clinical coding.

The motion graphic below provides further information on the work of Practice Administrative Staff Collaborative (PASC).

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## Is workflow optimisation right for my practice

In order to be successful, workflow optimisation requires a ‘whole practice’ approach to reduce the amount of documents requiring GP involvement. This will enable trained practice administrative staff to follow a clear set of locally developed and agreed protocols to ensure correspondence is dealt with in a safe, efficient and effective way.

If you think this process will interest your practice, our toolkit will provide information and guidance on how to plan, test and implement changes to current practices using a quality improvement approach.

# Preparing for workflow optimisation

## The overarching aim of workflow optimisation

To ensure that correspondence management is done by the most appropriate member of the team in order to enhance GP capacity to practice as an expert medical generalist.

In order to be prepared for the work that lies ahead, using a workflow optimisation readiness tool can be helpful.

This readiness tool has been developed as part of the collaborative and can help practices establish:

- current state of play within the practice
- the motivation of staff within the practice to develop, test and implement workflow optimisation, and
- practice resources and abilities to develop, test and implement workflow optimisation.

## Being prepared

There are a number of steps to consider before embarking on this work:

**Step 1: Establish a project team in your practice**

1. Who is in your project team?
2. When are you going to meet (how regularly)?
3. How are you going to communicate?
4. How are you going to communicate with wider practice team?

**Step 2: Carry out a baseline audit**

In order to know your current state and whether you have a problem that can be improved, it is important to carry out a baseline audit to establish the following:

- How many documents are received into the practice on a daily basis?
- How many documents are currently sent to the GP for review?
- If not all documents are sent to the GP, what documents are not sent and why?

*'To measure is to know – rather than assume – what to improve, where to improve and whether you are successful in your efforts to improve.'*

Ross Davies
Data & Measurement Advisor
Healthcare Improvement Scotland

This audit should ideally be carried out over at least 5 working days in order to capture any daily changes in activity. Use the resources below for the baseline audit.

- Docman baseline data collection tool
- Docman common sense audit instructions
- Docman dip sample audit: Data capture and evaluation tool

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**Step 3: Understand your current system and processes**

Every team member will have some knowledge of how their practice's processes work. In order to ensure an accurate reflection of how processes work in practice, it is helpful to chart your existing system with your team. This can be done by process mapping.

The benefits of process mapping:

- to capture and visually represent all the steps in an existing process
- to show everyone in a team how a process works in practice now, rather than what they *think* is happening
- to help identify change ideas for improvement
- to visually represent a new process, and
- to assist team building as all team members should be involved in accurately capturing the existing process and the design of any new process.

For more information on process mapping and its benefits click here. You can also view a process map example.

**Step 4: Identify your resources and what you need**

Process mapping your local system should help you identify your existing resources and those you need. These should include:

- what current protocols you have for workflow optimisation
- consideration of staffing - job title and change of roles and you may require additional administrative staff to implement this work
- contacting your indemnity provider to discuss proposed work and consider any practice implications
- IT systems, and
- dedicated workspace.

**Step 5: Identify and provide staff education**

Identifying the staff education needed to progress this work is crucial. Providing training and education for practice administrative staff can result in staff feeling empowered and give them a sense of responsibility and ownership of the work.

Resources to help you identify and provide staff training.

- Top tips for workflow optimisation education
- Example training needs analysis assessment
- Workflow optimisation staff confidence survey
- Workflow optimisation staff questionnaire

# Delivering workflow optimisation

To deliver workflow optimisation and develop a safe, efficient and effective process, a number of steps need to be taken.

**Step 1: Develop your team's aim for workflow optimisation**
It is crucial that your team develops an aim for workflow optimisation and decides what is to be achieved and when. This will help your team use the knowledge of your local system gained from process mapping to develop specific time-bound aims that will galvanise action within your practice and monitor progress.

Once you have developed an aim this will help with developing ideas or a theory of how to achieve this and what can be tested.

**Step 2: Create a driver diagram**
A driver diagram is a tool which visually presents a team's theory of how a goal will be achieved. Creating a driver diagram with your team identifies your aim, what steps you require to ensure you achieve your aim, and helps the whole team to contribute to ideas for change to achieve the desired outcome.

For more information and guidance on driver diagrams click here.

The PASC local team driver diagram developed by the PASC phase 1 teams or the workflow optimisation driver diagram may help you think about which change ideas to test.

**Step 3: Test your ideas in order to develop your protocol**
Rapid small tests of change are the best way to identify what is working or not working in order to refine and retest. Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) cycles are a helpful tool to facilitate this process.

For more information and guidance on PDSA cycles click here.

Here are some examples of PDSA cycles undertaken by PASC phase 1 teams.

- PASC PDSA cycle example 1
- PASC PDSA cycle example 2
- PASC PDSA blank template

**Step 4: Develop your workflow optimisation protocol and/or policy**
Now that you have had an opportunity to test ideas and bring them together you should have a protocol and/or policy to test.

Here are some examples of PASC phase 1 teams' protocols for workflow optimisation, that you may wish to use and develop for your own team:
Correspondence management policy (example)

Document management pathway example
Correspondence protocol example

**Step 5: Test your workflow optimisation protocol and/or policy**

When testing your protocol and/or policy, make sure that you:

- collect data about the amount of documentation going to the GP pre and post testing and implementation of the protocol and/or policy
- build in checks for safety – is the protocol and/or policy safely doing what it is supposed to do, and
- ask how your staff are feeling about the change. Gather staff opinion pre and post changes to work practice.

You may wish to revisit the staff satisfaction surveys in the previous section at this point to help gather your staff opinion.

# How to measure progress

Now that you are testing your protocol and practice procedures, it is important to build on the data you collected before you implemented the change (baseline data) so that you know that any changes you have made have resulted in an improvement.

The measures developed by PASC phase 1 teams may help you when considering these elements.

- PASC workflow optimisation measure 1 (outcome)
- PASC workflow optimisation measure 2 (process measure)

## Ways to measure

There are different ways to measure this in your practice.

- Manual measurement - how many documents are received into the practice and what goes where?
- Use of existing IT document management systems; for example Docman or Vision.

The following tools can support you with your measurement.

- Updating docman reporting spreadsheet
- Setting-up and importing vision guidelines

## Collect regular and consistent data

Whatever system you adopt, it is important to try and collect regular and consistent data over time.

The workflow optimisation data collection worksheet can assist with data collection in your practice.

It is important to continue to sample data for potential adverse events. The data template includes a section on how this can be done.

## Share and discuss your data

Finally, the most important thing is to share and discuss your data with your practice team so all are involved and know what is working and what is not.

PASC phase 1 teams used a 'digging deeper' resource to review and discuss their progress.

# Sustaining success

Achieving success is great but it is important to plan for sustaining that success. Our PASC phase 1 teams have provided a number of top tips to help you with this.

**Top tips**

1. Consider and plan for ongoing educational needs of existing and new practice staff.
2. Sample data to check that the improvement is sustained, and continue to check for any adverse events (don't stop once you see a reduction).
3. Continue to measure staff satisfaction on the new workflow optimisation ways of working.
4. Celebrate success and the difference it has made to individuals, teams and patients.

The IHI tips for sustaining your hard-won improvements document provides further support.

Hear more from our PASC phase 1 team on the success of workflow optimisation in their GP practice.



**Published July 2019**



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