Getting it right first time: An evaluation of referral triage within a community-based integrated musculoskeletal (MSK) service

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Solent MSK Pathway:

GP/primary care referral
Self-referral to physiotherapy

Referral Triage

Solent MSK Speciality:
- Physiotherapy
- MSK Specialist Assessment and Treatment Team (IMAT)
- Pain Team
- Rheumatology

Treated and Discharged
Onward Referral to Secondary Care

Project Journey:

Problem:
- Anecdotal concerns referral triage not effective
- Patient journey convoluted

Opportunity Medical Student Project

Primary Aim:
To evaluate the effectiveness of referral triage within Southampton Solent MSK service

Secondary Aims:
- What proportion of patients are managed independently by the service?
- What areas of the pathway could be improved or streamlined?

Methods
- Evaluation of patient records sampled from 2017/18
- 130 male records and 170 female records were included.
- Mean age 50 years (range 19-98).
- Data recorded and evaluated:
  - Referral request
  - Triage outcome
  - Treatment received
  - Final outcome

Key Findings
- 71% (163/229) GP referrals were treated and managed by same speciality requested by GP
- 94% (282/300) all referrals were treated and managed by same speciality requested by referral triage
- 87% (62/71) physiotherapy self-referrals were treated and managed by physiotherapy alone
- 4.3% (13/300) referrals were referred to secondary care for further management
- 87% (260/300) referrals were managed by one speciality (87%) following triage

Next Steps
- Learning from Excellence – 94% of cases triaged effectively. Is 100% possible?
- To explore the 40/300 (13%) patients receiving care from more than one speciality in their journey – can this be streamlined to one speciality?

Personal Learning
- Fantastic experience gained in supervising medical student undertaking project within clinical service.
- Gained skills in developing methodology to address project aims, leading and mentoring, time management, and marking of academic assignment.
- Service evaluations provide good evidence of current practice that can be used as baseline data for future service changes or improvement initiatives.