Musculoskeletal Conditions in Primary Care: Physiotherapists Managing Demand through Telephone Triage

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BACKGROUND

A Telephone Triage Service is implemented within many GP surgeries in Portsmouth City to manage their demand for appointments, particularly urgent on-the-day consultations. The Solent NHS MSK Service was approached by Portsmouth Primary Care Alliance Ltd to work collaboratively to provide an innovative MSK Telephone Triage Service, led by a senior MSK physiotherapist, to manage on-the-day MSK Primary Care contacts.

OBJECTIVES

1. To reduce the on-the-day demand on GP time for patients with MSK problems
2. To provide specialist MSK advice over the phone at first point of contact
3. To enable patients to see the right person at the right time within the MSK service

SERVICE OVERVIEW

Patient contacts GP surgery for on-the-day appointment & gets placed on Triage list

MSK Presentation: Physiotherapist to Triage over phone
Non-MSK Presentation: GP to Triage over phone

OUTCOMES:

1. Advice & Self refer to physiotherapy
2. Referral to MSK Service
3. Advised attend A&E / Walk-in centre
4. Referral back to surgery: Nurse / GP appt

RESULTS

Over the 6 month pilot, there was a 35% reduction in GP referrals to MSK Physiotherapy, representing 135 saved GP appointments
Overall, MSK Services managed 63% of the telephone calls with no primary care input required
The experienced MSK Physiotherapist sign-posted patients effectively to the most appropriate information & services in a timely manner

MSK Telephone Triage Pilot Service Results %

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Result</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patient managed by MSK Service</td>
<td>63%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patient received primary care input</td>
<td>34%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patient advised A&amp;E / Walk-in Centre</td>
<td>3%</td>
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Figure 1. Outcomes of MSK Telephone Triage Pilot Service

340 patients in total were triaged by the physiotherapist.

Regarding the 63% managed within the MSK service:
- 117 were provided with specialist advice & informed of the self referral process
- 91 were referred to physiotherapy
- 5 were referred to specialist MSK services

Of the 34% receiving primary care input:
- 61 saw a nurse practitioner
- 57 saw their GP

The remaining 9 were advised to attend A&E / Walk-in centre

LESSONS LEARNED

☆ Physiotherapists can help manage the demand in primary care for MSK Conditions using a telephone triage service, while providing specialist advice to this patient group resulting in effective triaging / sign-posting
☆ The key to its success was building strong working relationships with the primary care team, which enabled effective management of patients requiring a prescription or sick-cert for example
☆ The main challenge identified was the need to further develop the IT systems between primary care and the MSK services, but the promising pilot results have engaged the Portsmouth Primary Care Alliance Ltd to support further implementation across the whole Portsmouth City area for 2017/2018