

Barts Health: Progress update on outpatients

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Purpose

This report provides an update on performance for outpatients at Barts Health NHS Trust.

This report is produced following a request by the Tower Hamlets Health Scrutiny Committee for an update on outpatient services, in particular on waiting times and appointment letters.

Outpatients at Barts Health

The vision for Barts Health is to change lives, by delivering excellent health outcomes and health improvement for the residents of east London and beyond. Barts Health delivers 1.4 million outpatient appointments per year across our six hospital sites. The Trust has recently expanded its services and introduced new ways of delivering care for our patients, through telephone and skype consultations.

The key areas for the Barts Health outpatient strategy are to improve standards, improve patient pathways and use IT to transform patient experience. In order to review and improve services, the Trust has implemented the following structures:

- A Transformation Board to oversee change and share good practice across the organisation
- A tried and tested programme of pathway change for all clinical teams
- Operational meetings on each site
- A training and development programme to embed pathways through lean principles
- Weekly meetings to lead change with general managers
- Engagement events with a variety of staff involved in delivering outpatient services

Over a three year period, there has been a significant improvement in core standards for outpatient services, which has been measured by response times. However patient feedback provides a more comprehensive insight into how our services are performing. Following improvements in access to first outpatient appointments and rebuilding the outpatient environment over the past three years (2009 – 2012), patient feedback has told us that:

- Reported problems with appointment times down from 17% to 4%
- 6% of patients reported problems with the environment in 2012 - a decrease from 25% in 2009

- The net promoter score (how many patients recommend the service) improving from 52% to 87% on the Whipps Cross site.

The focus for improving standards in 2013 has been to be more efficient in the turnaround time of outpatient letters. With 1.4 million outpatient letters being sent to GPs and patients, we need to ensure clear reporting on our performance. The Trust has consistently improved turnaround of letters month on month and following rigorous scrutiny and local actions. The majority of our services are now close to or under 10 days for letter turnaround times.

Further work has just started to look at reviewing waiting times in clinics across the organisation and our outpatient services will now be reporting monthly feedback on the Friends and Family test. The Trust would be happy to report back to members on this early next year.

Improvements in pathways and innovations in care

Barts Health has also started a systematic review of outpatient pathways to ensure that we take advantage of recent innovations in care and that the patient pathway is consistent across the Trust.

Creating ideal pathways is the best way of producing better outcomes for our patients and more effective, timely care. Barts Health started a programme in April 2013, where 18 service teams were supported to take part in pathway redesign events, to review how they can improve pathways and patient experience. The programme has produced some major improvements for patients including:

- Introducing one stop haematuria (urology) pathways that ensure all diagnostics are completed on the day with a full report back to the GP within five days
- Straight to diagnostic tests for a number of gynaecology pathways ensuring diagnosis and treatment is given more rapidly for the patient
- Introducing one stop clinics for Gynaecology services to shorten the time to treatment and move patients from daycase to an outpatient setting
- Changes to cardiac patient pathways that have promoted consistent discharging and enabled capacity for new patients to be seen more quickly
- Improvements to rheumatology patient pathways – moving to one stop clinics delivered within 2 weeks of referral
- Delivering one stop maternity services to ensure faster care for patients and releasing capacity for a growing number of births
- Telephone follow-ups for breast and testis cancer patients in their homes rather than in a clinic setting.

The Trust is planning to review pathways for other specialties and will have an on-going programme to care outpatient care within each area.

Concerns raised by members

Through the committee officer, members have provided examples of individual patient experiences, which relate to appointments for diagnostics and inpatient care. However without knowing the identity of the patients, and gaining their consent to review their records, we cannot give a definitive answer to these. The Trust would welcome more detail and consent so we can address these fully.

With regards to concerns on waiting times experienced by patients for the central outpatients' appointments line - the waiting times for appointments are regularly reviewed by the outpatients' team; there was an increase in waiting times earlier this year due to an increase in demand for outpatient services overall, and a peak in activity at certain times in the week.

To ensure waiting times are much lower for patients and to improve the experience when booking appointments, the Trust has now agreed to bring in additional staff resource for the central outpatients' appointments line. We expect to be implemented in November 2013.

The Trust also moved to a different booking process for appointments in June this year (Full Booking) whereby patients do not get an appointment letter asking them to call in to the appointments line; instead they are directly called by staff at the hospital to arrange an appointment. This will result in improvement for patients and we will continue to monitor patient feedback on the system.

Conclusion

Outpatient care is the most common contact that a patient has with the Trust and there is an ongoing programme of work to that looks at how we can make improvements. The information above outlines specific areas of improvement over the past year, and describes the Trusts commitment to making further improvements for our patients.