

Improving communication with General Practice

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Rural Northwest Health

Introduction

The Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) Model for Improvement project has been a 12 month project that aims to improve care for clients with chronic and complex conditions through improved systems of practice.

Rural Northwest Health (RNH) worked closely with the Yarriambiack Medical Clinic to improve feedback, referral acknowledgement and communication between Community and Allied Health practitioners and GPs.

RNH undertook small rapid cycles of quality improvement during 2011 using the PDSA Model for Improvement. A key feature of the approach was the use of data to measure change and effect.

RNH has tested a variety of change ideas and worked closely with the GPs to grow and sustain work in chronic care systems improvement.

Methods

Build an improvement team

We invited interested clinicians from Allied and Community Health to join an improvement team. Our aim was to improve timely, comprehensive and consistent communication between RNH Community and Allied health Staff and GPs.

Understanding our business

We undertook an audit of how and when we communicated with GPs and the tools that we were using to do this. We found that prior to this project communication was limited, inconsistent and did not meet Victorian best practice guidelines.

Changing our business systematically and proactively

We knew we had to now educate staff on accessing and using our communication templates from our client management system. Templates are available for communicating with GPs to acknowledge a referral, failure to attend, client declined service, unable to contact client and GP feedback report. Staff were then able to use these templates to provide comprehensive, timely and consistent feedback to the GPs.

Involving clients

Clients were happy for us to share their information with their GP and this was given as written and verbal client consent.

Adapting a multi-skilled, multi-agency approach

The changes were implemented with the support of management and we have adopted these at the three campuses of RNH. We now communicate consistently with all three GP clinics in our catchment.

Results

Plan, Do, Study, Act has significantly improved communication and relations with our GP clinics. GPs and Practice Managers are very pleased with the new improvements and want them to continue.

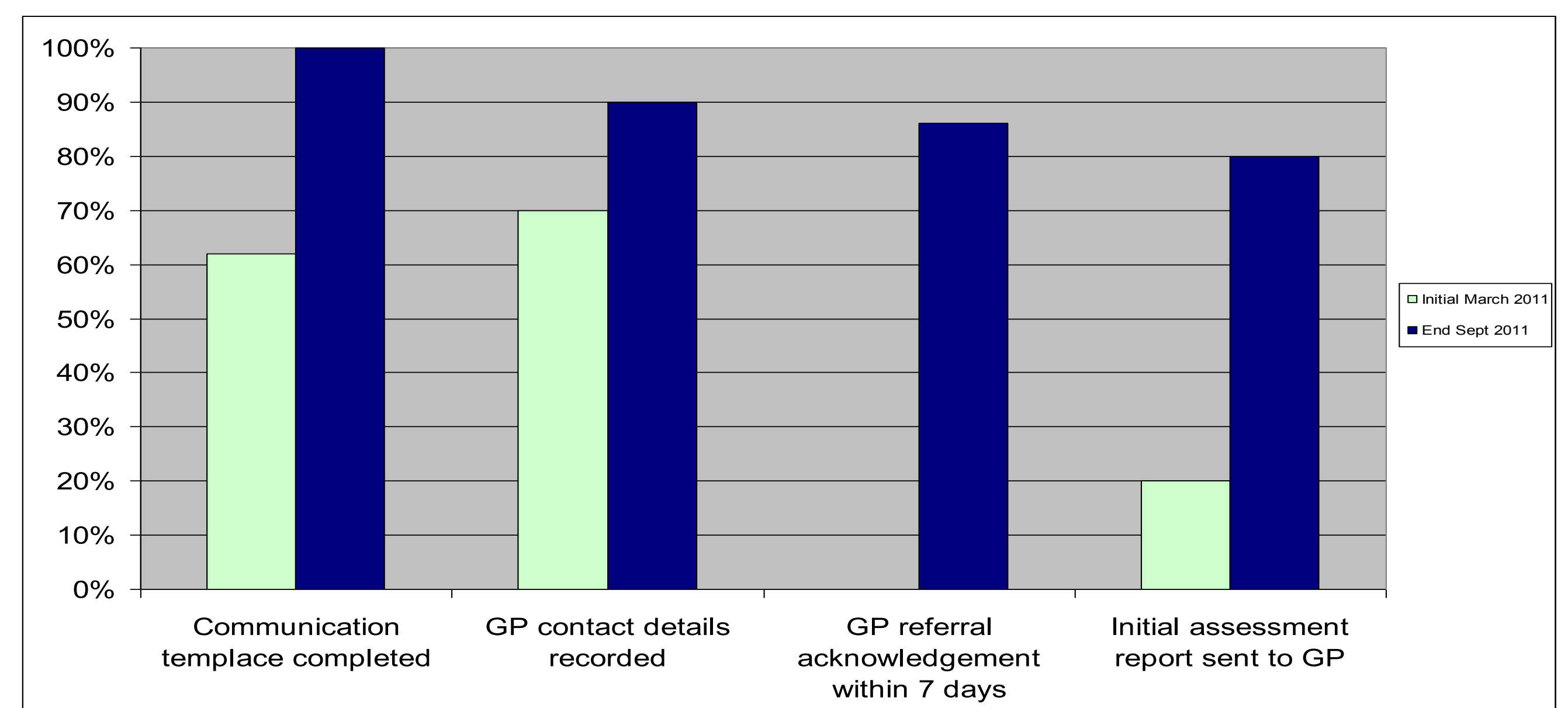
Staff are now using the communication tools and with our increase in staff numbers, we have had to keep educating and supporting them to do this work.

Results continued...

Education of staff has been a major part of this work—we have used various methods to encourage staff of the value of these improvements and to embed this into everyday practice.

Our intake/reception worker has noted that GP referrals to our service have increased by about 30% as a result of our improved communication processes.

Our communication processes have greatly improved as the results below show:



Discussion

Strategies are being investigated to ensure that staff use the GP communication tools with every client. Time commitments for clinicians mean that communication with GPs doesn't always happen.

Orientation for new staff will now include the GP communication tools and templates processes.

Our next step is to adopt a protocol for our Community and Allied Health Department for communicating with GPs.

"We now read the communication letters and know who else is involved in the clients care—this is much better for the client"
Practice Manager, Warracknabeal

"This project was challenging due to the time factor, but beneficial for communication between GP's and CHS."
Diabetes Nurse Educator, RNH Community Health

"The PDSA cycle process has given us the skills to make improvements in small chunks, each cycle led to the next improvement and we got somewhere!"
Occupational Therapist, RNH Community Health

Conclusions

The PDSA process breaks change down into small steps. Instead of the changes being big and unachievable, we have been able to make significant improvements over time in how we communicate with GPs.

Our team is excited about improving our practice further using PDSA so that clients in our region receive holistic, individual and best practice care.

Small changes lead to bigger things—we want our health service to meet best practice standards and Department of Health guidelines and thus improve the care for clients with chronic and complex conditions. The PDSA approach gives us a quality improvement framework to help us get there.

Collaborating agencies: Rural Northwest Health Community Health Department, Wimmera Primary Care Partnership, West Vic Division of General Practice and Yarriambiack Medical Clinic.

Further information: www.rnh.net.au

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