

Est.
1841

YORK
ST JOHN
UNIVERSITY

Boak, George ORCID:

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4489-3096>, Sephton, Ruth, Hough, Elaine and ten Hove, Ruth (2017) Quality improvement in physiotherapy services. *International Journal of Health Care Quality Assurance*, 30 (5). pp. 424-435.

Downloaded from: <http://ray.yorks.ac.uk/id/eprint/1999/>

The version presented here may differ from the published version or version of record. If you intend to cite from the work you are advised to consult the publisher's version:

<https://doi.org/10.1108/IJHCQA-05-2016-0066>

Research at York St John (RaY) is an institutional repository. It supports the principles of open access by making the research outputs of the University available in digital form. Copyright of the items stored in RaY reside with the authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full text items free of charge, and may download a copy for private study or non-commercial research. For further reuse terms, see licence terms governing individual outputs. [Institutional Repository Policy Statement](#)

RaY

Research at the University of York St John

For more information please contact RaY at ray@yorks.ac.uk



Quality improvement in physiotherapy services

Journal:	<i>International Journal of Health Care Quality Assurance</i>
Manuscript ID	IJHCQA-05-2016-0066.R2
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Keywords:	Quality improvement, Process improvement, Healthcare, Systems change

SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

Quality improvement in physiotherapy services

Author 1

Name: George Boak

Qualifications: MSc, MA, PhD

Job title: Senior Lecturer in Leadership and Innovation

Department: York Business School

Institution: York St John University

Town/City: York

Country: United Kingdom

Telephone: 01904 624624

e-mail: g.boak@yorks.ac.uk

Author 2

Name: Ruth Sephton

Qualifications: Graduate Diploma Physiotherapy, MSc Physiotherapy

Job title: Consultant Musculoskeletal Physiotherapist

Department: Physiotherapy

Institution: 5 Boroughs Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

Town/City: Warrington

Country: United Kingdom

Telephone: 01512 443465

e-mail: ruth.sephton@5bp.nhs.uk

Name: Elaine Hough

Qualifications: MSc Health Sciences, BSc Physiotherapy

Job title: Consultant Physiotherapist

Department: Physiotherapy

Institution: 5 Boroughs Partnership NHS foundation Trust

Town/City: St Helens and Whiston

Country: United Kingdom

Telephone: 01744 621688

e-mail: dwgie@hotmail.com

Name: Ruth ten Hove

Qualifications: MSc MCSP

Job title: Head of Development and Research

Institution: Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

Town/City: London

Country: UK

Telephone: 0207 314 7853

e-mail: tenhover@csp.org.uk

Corresponding author: George Boak

Corresponding Author's Email: g.boak@yorks.ac.uk

Acknowledgments: Many people contributed valuable time and information to this research. The authors thank **in particular:** Victoria Dickens, Andrea Evans, Ruth Heaton, Keith Mills, Judith Neilson, Annalisa Newson, Sivaraj Shanmugam and Laura Williams.

Structured Abstract

Purpose: To evaluate a process change in physiotherapy services and to explore factors that may have influenced the outcomes.

Design/methodology/approach: Multiple case study: information was gathered from eight physiotherapy teams over 24 months.

Findings: The process change was successfully implemented in six teams. It had a clear, positive effect on service quality provided to patients in three teams. Whilst quality also improved in three other teams, other issues make changes difficult to assess. Suggestions are made as to factors that enabled the process change to be effective.

Research limitations/implications: Findings are based on results achieved by only eight English teams.

Practical implications: This process change may be appropriate for other teams providing physiotherapy or other therapies if attention is paid to potential enabling factors, and a learning approach is adopted to designing and introducing the change.

Originality/value: ~~This is the first process change longitudinal study in therapy services.~~ **To the best of our knowledge, no other longitudinal study of this process change in therapy services has been published.**

Keywords: Quality improvement; Process improvement; Healthcare; Systems change.

Article Classification: Research

Received 12th May 2016

Revised 14th November 2016

Accepted

Introduction

There is pressure on healthcare service staff throughout the developed world to cope with rising demand and constrained funds (WHO, 2009). Process improvement (Health Foundation, 2013; Porter and Lee, 2013), quality improvement (Gauld *et al.*, 2014) and Lean management (Jones and Mitchell, 2006) have been used to change systems, improve value and reduce waste. There are claims about methodological effectiveness (Hwang *et al.*, 2014; Mazzocato *et al.*, 2010), although some commentators voice doubts about how easily these approaches can be applied to healthcare (Burgess and Radnor, 2013; McIntosh *et al.*, 2014; Young and McClean, 2009).

Our aim is to examine how one particular process improvement was attempted in National Health Service (NHS) musculoskeletal (MSK) physiotherapy services. This was part of a larger study, where representatives from 11 MSK physiotherapy teams in north-west England agreed to carry out process improvements in their services and to share information with colleagues. The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) supported the projects by providing information about process improvements in physiotherapy services elsewhere and, where relevant, provided advice specific to a particular service's needs. The improvements that staff in 11 services decided to implement depended on their individual circumstances, including perceptions of **patient** needs, service pressures, resources and the impact of other changes.

We focus on a change that staff in eight services attempted to introduce; i.e., reduce waiting times for treatment and reduce wasted resource caused by patients not attending appointments (DNA). This resource would then be used more productively to ensure good patient care.

The availability of routine MSK physiotherapy service data in the NHS is limited (Dorning and Bardsley, 2014), but recent survey results (CSP, 2013), indicate that it is not unusual for service staff to be faced with increasing demand and pressures on staffing, and that these factors may lead to longer waiting times before a patient is able to see a therapist. Patient waits for therapy are related to service quality, as waits may prolong discomfort and lead to deterioration in patients' condition, and longer periods in treatment (CSP, 2009). To date, only a few case studies show how physiotherapists have been able to change their systems and processes to improve their services (Amlani, 2011; Boak *et al.*, 2015; Harding, 2011; Robinson, 2011). None has focused on the specific change introduced by these services.

Improving processes in healthcare

Methods used in manufacturing organisations to improve systems and processes, and to reduce waste have been introduced in healthcare. These methods are variously described as process improvement (DH, 2011; Health Foundation, 2013; Kaplan and Porter, 2011; Locock, 2003; NHS III, 2005), quality improvement (Aveling *et al.*, 2012; Gauld *et al.*, 2014; Gijo *et al.*, 2013) and Lean management (Brandao de Souza, 2009; Drotz and Poksinska, 2014; Hwang *et al.*, 2014; IHI, 2005; Jones and Mitchell, 2006). There are broad similarities between these approaches (Walshe, 2009). Process improvement is concerned with analysing and redesigning healthcare systems and processes to make them more effective and efficient (Locock, 2003; NHS III, 2005). Quality improvement focuses on value to customers – in healthcare, a key aspect is better outcomes for patients (Batalden and Davidoff, 2007) – and waste reduction (Gijo *et al.*, 2013). Lean is based on identifying and producing services and products that customers value, while eliminating waste (Joosten *et al.*, 2009). Process analysis and process change - key process improvements - are central elements (Mazzocato *et al.*, 2010). Lean in manufacturing is designed to be a system-wide approach, but in healthcare Lean may focus on specific techniques (Waring and Bishop 2010) or be 'primarily implemented as a process improvement approach' (Drotz and Poksinska, 2014, p. 179) or be applied in a fragmented, rather than a systemic, way (Burgess and Radnor, 2013).

Radnor *et al.*, (2012, p.364) report 'growing evidence of the potential impact on quality, cost and time' that process improvement projects have in healthcare, with tangible outputs such as 'reduction in waiting times, increases in quality through a reduction of errors, reduction in costs, as well as intangible ones such as increased employee motivation and increased customer satisfaction'. Although process and quality improvements often appear to emphasise tools that can be applied to solve problems in several contexts (Al-Balushi *et al.*, 2014), studies indicate that applying these tools in healthcare settings is not straightforward (Drotz and Poksinska, 2014; Walshe, 2007). Some recent work in this area argues the need to understand the ways in which approaches are adopted and implemented in specific social contexts (Joosten *et al.*, 2009; Khatami and Rosengren, 2015; Langley and Denis, 2011; Øvretveit, 2004; Powell *et al.*, 2009; Waring and Bishop, 2010). Walshe (2007, p. 58) argues it is important to 'unpick the complex relationship between context, content, application and outcomes, and to develop a necessarily contingent and situational understanding of

effectiveness'. In physiotherapy, research into a new assessment tool concluded there was value in exploring 'situated understanding', as healthcare professionals do not passively accept and apply clinical knowledge, but 'engage in the active interpretation and reconstruction of its local validity and usefulness' (Sanders *et al.*, 2014, p. 97).

There is an evident need to engage clinicians if process changes are to be successful (Abdallah, 2014; Gollop *et al.*, 2004; Powell *et al.*, 2009). Process improvement approaches often advocate that practitioners who deliver services should be involved in decisions about how to change them (Locock, 2003; Sanders *et al.*, 2014.). Change studies in healthcare note that individual perspectives on proposed changes may be influenced by, among other things, perceived motivation behind the change and that, in particular, clinicians may be suspicious about changes they perceive to be managerialist (Gollop *et al.*, 2004; Ham *et al.*, 2003; Young and McClean, 2009).

Common areas for process improvement in healthcare concern patient waiting times and reducing scheduled appointments where patients do not attend (DNA). Waiting times are a quality element (Appleby *et al.*, 2014; Thorlby and Maybin, 2010) and a focus for analysis and improvement in healthcare (Foote *et al.*, 2004, Gijo *et al.*, 2013, Lodge and Bamford, 2007). In physiotherapy, as in other healthcare areas, shorter waiting times may lead to improved outcomes for patients (Amlani, 2011; CSP, 2009; Harding, 2011; Robinson, 2011). ~~DNAs are an obvious waste in healthcare systems.~~ In 2004, the UK NHS Modernisation Agency included 'Avoid unnecessary follow-ups' among ten recommended high impact changes, noting that:

Each year in the NHS there are 37 million 'followup' [sic] appointments where patients are asked to return to hospital to have their progress checked, to undergo tests, or to get test results. A significant proportion of these follow-up visits are clinically unnecessary, create inconvenience and anxiety for patients and waste valuable resources. 75% of all outpatient 'Did Not Attends' (DNA) are for follow-up appointments ... There are more than four million follow-up DNAs per annum, which cost the NHS more than £100 million a year (p. 43).

Young and McClean (2009, p. 382) described this recommendation as a 'classical Lean elimination of waste'. In physiotherapy, a small number of single organisation case studies focus on DNAs (Clews, 2013; El-Tantawy *et al.*, 2000; French *et al.*, 2005; Harding, 2011). Attempts to change healthcare systems often require willing healthcare professionals, patients and other stakeholders (Sanders *et al.*, 2014). Where a reduction in DNAs is sought, a change in patient behaviour is a key factor. Behavioural economists attempt to understand and influence choices made by patients and the public in healthcare areas such as public health (Loewenstein *et al.*, 2012); diet and obesity (Liu, 2014) and heart disease prevention (Holt, 2010). Ideas drawn from social influence theory have attempted to reduce DNAs in general practice: Martin *et al.*, (2012) tested small changes in communication with patients about appointments and found that – after some adjustment to the methods – the changes reduced DNAs.

To summarise, there are claims about process improvement methods in healthcare, but studies urge caution ~~in applying methods as tools universally~~, arguing that context is important, and, therefore, a contingent and situational understanding is needed to improve services. In particular, it is usually important to engage clinicians in improvement processes. ~~Depending on their nature.~~ It may also be important to achieve willing behaviour change by patients – an area that behavioural economists have studied. Two common areas for process

1
2
3 improvement – both involving changes in behaviour by clinicians and patients – are reducing
4 waiting times, and reducing DNAs. Both can represent difficulties for physiotherapy services.
5

6 **Methodology**

7 We aimed to assess the attempts to change physiotherapy services provided to patients, and
8 therefore our study is evaluation research (Robson, 2011). As a realistic evaluation, we
9 sought to identify change effects, causal mechanisms leading to effects and the contextual
10 elements that may have affected the outcomes (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). We bore the
11 Mazzocato *et al.*, (2010, pp. 376-377) observations in mind: ‘Realistic evaluation is grounded
12 on the belief that social interventions, such as quality improvement initiatives, are complex,
13 and that the way they bring about change is influenced by, dependent on and in turn
14 influences their contexts.’ We adopted a multiple case study approach, focusing on eight
15 MSK physiotherapy services in north-west England. Multiple case studies have been used to
16 identify quality improvement patterns elsewhere in healthcare (Øvretveit and Klazinga, 2012)
17 and in healthcare organisation and management innovations (Øvretveit *et al.*, 2012). In a
18 review of Lean changes in healthcare, Mazzocato *et al.*, (2014, p.267) noted that most studies
19 had concerned single cases:
20
21
22
23

24 it is difficult to know if variation in performance is due to the content of the lean
25 changes, to the context of their application, to the process of implementation, or to
26 interactions between the three ... Comparative multiple-case studies of lean
27 applications could help clarify this knowledge gap.
28
29

30 Service improvement was monitored and evaluated at several points over 24 months and in
31 different ways. The services were among 11 that were attempting different changes. We
32 chose these eight services owing to the changes that were attempted; i.e., to introduce new
33 routine follow-up appointment methods. Progress data were gathered at three meetings
34 involving 11 service representatives over 15 months. Information was also gathered during
35 two individual interviews with service representatives at six and ten months. Further
36 information was gathered in three services after 12 months, through site visits and interviews.
37 Additional follow-up interviews, after 24 months, with representatives sought progress and
38 process information. On all occasions, information was sought about progress and about
39 respondents’ assessment of factors that enabled them to make progress, and factors that
40 blocked or challenged them. Statistical data on progress was supplied by the information
41 systems available to the teams, which varied from service to service.
42
43
44

45 Writing on research approaches to process changes in organisations, Langley (2009,
46 p. 414) notes that, whilst retrospective data gathering can yield interesting results, ‘there is
47 nothing quite like being there in real time.’ Having access to an ongoing change initiative ‘is
48 a golden opportunity to understand how the change will interact with its context’. Consent
49 was given by all team members who contributed information during the research. We agreed
50 that services would be anonymised and confidentiality terms were established. Formal
51 research ethics approval was granted by the university employing the first author.
52
53

54 **The change**

55 The services on which we focus all aimed to reduce patient waiting times and reduce DNAs
56 by introducing a new system for arranging routine follow-up appointments. This was the
57 most common change explored in all 11 services involved in the network. In a traditional
58
59
60

1
2
3 appointment system, a patient sees a physiotherapist for an initial assessment and perhaps
4 some therapy or guidance is provided. In routine outpatient cases, the patient is given
5 exercises designed to address their needs over time and to improve functionality and/or
6 reduce pain. At the first appointment, before the patient leaves the clinic, a follow-up
7 appointment is booked. An alternative approach is known as an 'opt-in' system; i.e., the
8 patient is invited to make the follow-up appointment if s/he feels it's needed, within a certain
9 time period following the initial meeting with the physiotherapist, after the patient has
10 undertaken the recommended exercises. If they choose not to opt in during this period, they
11 are discharged. In behavioural economic terms, this change to the system re-structures the
12 decisions that the patient is asked to make. A similar approach has been taken to re-organise
13 making a first therapy service appointment, where patients are encouraged to self-refer, rather
14 than accessing services only through referral by a doctor (CSP, 2009; DH, 2008). Effects
15 include:
16

- 17
- 18
- 19 • less wasted time for some patients, who might otherwise attend follow-up
20 appointments they do not need;
- 21 • reduced DNA rates, because patients choose whether or not to take the initiative in
22 making a follow-up appointment; those who do, are more likely to keep it;
- 23 • less wasted time for clinicians, because fewer appointment slots are lost to DNAs:
24 clinicians are therefore more productive.
25

26
27 Consequently, we focus on practice in eight services that set out to make this change and on
28 factors that appeared to affect the service. We discuss what lessons can be taken from the
29 initiatives.
30

31 **Results**

32 Staff in eight services in the network attempted to introduce opt-in systems (coded as services
33 A-H). Services covered different environments, urban, rural and mixed. Typically, they
34 provided therapy at different sites within their catchment area. Services ranged from 12 to 31
35 whole time equivalent (WTE) therapists. The eight services took different approaches to
36 implementing the change and achieved different results. Progress and outcome summaries
37 appear in (Table I). Three other services in the network did not attempt to introduce opt-in
38 systems: in one case this was because the appointment-booking system was centralised and
39 the service manager thought that staff would not be able to manage opt-in bookings, nor was
40 there any additional administrative support to set up an alternative system. In the other two
41 cases, major changes to organisational systems and structures meant that service staff made
42 no attempt to introduce changes during the project.
43
44

45 **Table I here**

46 *Progress and outcomes*

47
48 The services reported different results. Introduction and progress also varied between
49 services. In G and H, the change was not successfully introduced during the period that
50 information was gathered. In six other services, the change was introduced, but the outcomes
51 were not the same in each case. Dramatic reductions in DNAs were achieved in services A, B
52 and E, with smaller *estimated* reductions achieved in C, D and F. **However**, in C and D,
53 managers reported that other changes may have also reduced their DNAs. In B and E,
54 changes quickly affected DNAs. In B, DNAs were half what they had been in the same
55 period in the previous year (Table II). In E, the DNA rates dropped within a month to five
56 unfilled appointments, compared with 27 in the same period the previous year. In the
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 following month, they were five compared with 22 the previous year. In an ideal research
4 project, easily comparable data would be available from all the services, but in these cases all
5 statistical data on progress was supplied by the information systems available to the teams,
6 and format varied from site to site.
7

8 **Table II here**

9
10
11 In A, however, there was little effect for three months and then the change had an effect
12 (Table III). In C, there was no change in DNAs or waiting times for six months – but the
13 team leader said that demand for therapy had increased during that time and was being met
14 with no extra resources or waiting time increases, so perhaps the change was having an
15 effect.
16

17 **Table III here**

18
19
20 It is not clear why these differences should have been experienced. However, service A staff
21 introduced the change in a pilot area covering many patients, whereas in B and E, each
22 introduced the change in one clinic only. In B and E, DNA rates were initially higher than A
23 and so logically there was more scope for improvement. In B and E, there was less scope for
24 patients to revert to the old advanced booking system, whereas with services A and C,
25 patients could stop at the reception desk and make their next appointment on the way out.
26 One unexpected outcome experienced in A and B was that waiting times for follow-up
27 appointments were reduced, because appointments were not automatically booked for several
28 weeks ahead. This meant that patients who chose to opt in were offered an appointment soon
29 after they requested one and physiotherapists were more easily able to book follow-up
30 appointments for more acute patients, who needed hands-on therapy, shortly after the first
31 appointment. A further positive outcome was that, by increasing capacity, the change also
32 reduced waiting time for new appointments. Another unexpected outcome reported in A, B
33 and D was that the reduction in appointments lost to DNAs affected the time available to staff
34 to undertake administrative tasks. Previously, some lost time had been used by clinicians for
35 these tasks. **Whilst the change improved productivity, some allowance had to be made to**
36 **enable staff to complete their administrative tasks.**
37
38

39 *Success factors*

40 Looking across the eight services, it is possible to suggest key success factors for the change.
41 The most important factors appeared to be:
42

- 43 • clinician involvement and agreement
 - 44 • communications system
 - 45 • patient reactions
 - 46 • IT
 - 47 • no concurrent major organisational change
- 48
49
50

51 Clinician involvement and agreement was essential in services A-F, where the change was
52 introduced and sustained. In G and H, clinician reluctance or opposition led to the change
53 being resisted or discontinued. In B, where the pilot was extended to one additional site **and**
54 **where it was** not successful, the team leader attributed this, in part, to unwilling clinical staff
55 in the new location.
56

57 In all services where the change was introduced, clinical staff attitudes appeared to be
58 affected by experiences elsewhere, accepting clinical reasoning behind using opt-in systems,
59
60

1
2
3 professional body support for the system and accepting the need to solve pressing demand
4 and high DNA problems. In A, for example, the staff were open to the opt-in system. Many
5 were aware that opt-in systems were used elsewhere and the benefits managers claimed. They
6 also knew that their service needed to reduce its DNA rates. Shortly after the change was
7 introduced, the senior therapist who led the change said: 'So they were very open to it and
8 very interested to see how it could work here. No one was resistant to it, but naturally they
9 had concerns, which we were able to address.'

10
11 Communications systems ~~was extended~~ were important. The change required service
12 staff to take patient telephone calls requesting appointments. ~~Staff~~ In eight services
13 ~~attempting to introduce the change~~, this was possible to arrange – even if only in the pilot
14 site(s). Staff in one service said they would be unable to introduce this change as telephone
15 calls were handled centrally where staff were unwilling to take on this extra workload. ~~The~~
16 ~~service B manager said she thought that it would be difficult to spread the opt-in system to all~~
17 ~~clinics in her service, because the centralised telephone booking system would not be able to~~
18 ~~accommodate this. The manager of service B said she thought that the centralised telephone~~
19 ~~booking system would not be able to accommodate the spread of the opt-in system to all~~
20 ~~clinics in her service.~~
21

22 Patients were a key factor influencing outcomes. A mixed reaction from patients was
23 reported in A and C, with some patients in both cases booking appointments in the traditional
24 way. In A, this was thought to be linked to the patients being accustomed to booking
25 appointments in advance. ~~In C~~, therapists continued to book one or two follow-up
26 appointments in many cases, before moving to the opt-in system. Surveys carried out by staff
27 in ~~A, B, C all three services~~ and in F found that most opt-in patients were satisfied with
28 treatment and that, where they had not opted for further treatment, most had taken this
29 decision because they thought their self-management plan was effective. In the pilot site B,
30 staff took a particularly positive approach to explaining the change to patients, emphasising
31 therapeutic exercises and the need for patients to make further appointments only if or when
32 they judged the time was right.
33

34 The IT systems available to service staff varied greatly; e.g., staff in A, B and D were
35 able to call on real time DNA and waiting time data, but C staff had no such facility. Where
36 good systems were available, they enabled service managers or team leaders to quickly
37 identify where any problems were occurring and also to monitor the change's effect. Major
38 changes to systems and structures affected two services; staff said they were unable to
39 introduce change at the start. Major changes also later affected E, where therapy services
40 were put out to tender and the contract awarded to a private healthcare company that
41 discontinued the opt-in system. For other services, relative stability appeared an important
42 factor in enabling the changes to take place.
43
44

45 *Leading and managing the change*

46 Where services were successful in implementing this change, certain key actions were carried
47 out ~~by most/all teams~~:

- 48
49
- 50 • seeking information and advice from elsewhere: in all teams that implemented the
51 change, some information and advice was sought from staff working in other services
52 who had successfully implemented the change. This enabled therapists to satisfy their
53 concerns about the change's clinical value. The CSP's ~~(i.e., the professional body)~~
54 support was also a factor in satisfying concerns.
 - 55 • agreeing protocols: staff in all services developed protocols for the new system. To
56 manage ~~the~~ risk that any patient would be disadvantaged, staff in all services established
57 guidelines about which patients would not be suitable for the opt-in system, including
58
59
60

those who might not be able to make an informed decision about whether to seek a further appointment. To a greater or lesser extent, in each service, individual physiotherapists were able to make decisions within these guidelines about whether to use opt-in or to book appointments for individual patients.

- timely adjustments: piloting the change was important in A and C. In A, the pilot was defined large geographically. In C, the pilot was carried out by more senior physiotherapists. In both cases, this improved acceptance by therapists. In B, the system was introduced opportunistically, in response to a problem in one clinic. The success at that clinic prompted experiments in other sites. In all three cases, adjustments were made to the system during the pilot phase.

Discussion

The intervention in this research was relatively small in comparison to system-wide changes seen in many quality improvement programmes (Burgess and Radnor, 2013), but with a potentially powerful effect. The small scale and the intervention's containment meant that the change could be implemented without seeking full-stakeholder cooperation from a large number of stakeholders. The key groups were clinicians in the therapy teams, patients and in some cases administrative staff. Introducing opt-in systems for routine follow-up appointments re-structured the choices facing patients. Re-structuring can significantly reduce the numbers of total patients who did not attend appointments and thus improve productivity, and reduce waiting times for routine appointments. However, the interventions had different effects in different services – possibly owing to differences in how the changes were introduced and implemented, and contextual factors, such as C's increasing referrals.

Two key principles, already established elsewhere, were borne out in our sites: (i) changes require clinician support if they are to be effective (Abdallah, 2014; Sanders *et al.*, 2014); and (ii) outcomes are influenced by context (Khatami and Rosengren, 2015; Walshe, 2007). The most critical conditions for success in our research were that there was buy-in and action from clinicians, that patients were willing to cooperate and that the communication systems were able to support the change. Earlier research on changes in healthcare systems show that context affects success, and that an evaluation should seek to 'establish when, how and why the intervention works' (Walshe, 2007, p.58). Certain influential factors are evident in these cases.

A key mechanism for reducing DNAs and waiting times, was the change in choice and behaviour among some patients in each service. The behavioural change, on which behavioural economics focuses (Loewenstein *et al.*, 2012; Martin *et al.*, 2012), is in this context, the greater likelihood that patients will attend appointments that they make on their own initiative. Patients appeared to react best to this when the system was explained as being integral to their therapy (as in service B) and they were not accustomed to other appointment systems. It is possible that different patient groups in each case affected the intervention. Studying physiotherapy appointment DNAs in one hospital, French *et al.*, (2005) found that older patients were more likely to attend appointments. However, no demographic data on patients was systematically gathered in our case study sites; a suitable future research focus.

The therapists' involvement and agreement was influenced by the clinical case for this intervention as a means to tackling a situation that was agreed to be problematic. The clinical case was aided by the professional body's support and by accounts from other teams who had introduced a similar change, and by establishing an agreed protocol to safeguard vulnerable patients, and to preserve professional autonomy. In all cases, some adjustments were made to the way the new systems worked in each service based on experience: as Øvretveit *et al.*,

(2012, p. 246) remarked in different case studies, it was important to enable 'regular reviews and re-planning of the implementation'. Piloting and adjusting are advocated by process improvement and service improvement methods (Health Foundation, 2013; NHS III, 2005). The need for adjustments would be expected by researchers such as Walshe (2009) and Sanders *et al.*, (2014), with their emphasis on contextual influence and on tools and techniques.

The communications infrastructure for making routine appointments was central to the change; in two cases, no suitable system was cited by service staff as an insurmountable obstacle to adopting the intervention; in one other case the service manager believed it would limit extension beyond the pilot site. A third influential factor appeared to be IT systems providing prompt data.

Conclusions

These case studies show that changing the appointments system for routine follow-up therapy can reduce the total patients who do not attend appointments and subsequently reduce waiting times for new and for follow-up appointments. At a time when services are under pressure from rising demand and shrinking budgets, this is a significant finding. However, these results are not guaranteed and appear to depend at least in part on how the new system is explained to patients. There may also be other contextual factors that affect the change's effect. How quickly improvements were achieved also varied between the cases and some adjustments were necessary to the plans for change in all cases. Clinical and administrative staff's active cooperation was essential to the change. Factors that appeared to be important in engaging staff were:

- The system could benefit patients.
- It was being used in other services elsewhere, with good results.
- The professional body supported the system.
- There were acknowledged problems with the current working methods.
- Acceptable guidelines were developed as to when and to whom the new system would apply, which allowed some scope for exercising individual clinical judgement.

It appears likely that, where the conditions for introducing this change exist, or can be cultivated, it will benefit other therapy service providers, with the proviso that context affects the outcomes and, therefore, it is appropriate to take an approach that ~~which~~ acknowledges the importance of ~~that~~ careful experimentation and learning ~~are important~~.

References

- Abdallah, A. (2014), 'Implementing quality initiatives in healthcare organizations: drivers and challenges', *International Journal of Health Care Quality Assurance*, Vol. 27 No. 3, pp. 166 – 181.
- Al-Balushi, S., Sohal, A.S., Singh, P.J., Al Hajri, A., Al Farsi, Y.M. and Al Abri, R. (2014), 'Readiness factors for lean implementation in healthcare settings—a literature review', *Journal of Health Organization and Management* Vol. 28 No. 2, pp. 135-153.

- 1
2
3 Amlani, N. (2011), 'Self-Referral to Physiotherapy with 'Same Day' Advice, Triage and
4 Signposting', available at <[http://chain.ulcc.ac.uk/chain/documents/AHPprojectNavroz](http://chain.ulcc.ac.uk/chain/documents/AHPprojectNavrozAmlaniLincolnshireFINALv3.doc)
5 <<http://chain.ulcc.ac.uk/chain/documents/AHPprojectNavrozAmlaniLincolnshireFINALv3.doc>>, accessed April 2016.
- 6
7 Appleby, J., Thompson, J. and Jabbal, J. (2014), 'How is the NHS performing?' *Quarterly*
8 *monitoring report*, July, King's Fund, London.
- 9
10 Aveling, E-L., Martin, G., Armstrong, N., Banerjee, J. and Dixon-Woods, M. (2012),
11 'Quality improvement through clinical communities: eight lessons for practice',
12 *Journal of Health Organization and Management* Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 158-174.
- 13
14 Batalden, P.B. and Davidoff, F. (2007), 'What is 'quality improvement' and how can it
15 transform healthcare?' *Quality and Safety in Health Care*, Vol. 16 No. 1, pp. 2-3.
- 16
17 Boak, G., Dickens, V., Newson, A. and Brown, L. (2015), 'Distributed leadership, team
18 working and service improvement in healthcare', *Leadership in Health Services*, Vol.
19 28 Iss 4, pp. 332- 344.
- 20
21 Brandao de Souza, L. (2009), 'Trends and approaches in lean healthcare', *Leadership in*
22 *Health Services*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 121-139.
- 23
24 Burgess, N. and Radnor, Z. (2013), 'Evaluating Lean in healthcare', *International Journal of*
25 *Health Care Quality Assurance*, Vol. 26 No. 3, pp. 220 – 235.
- 26
27 Clews, G. (2013), 'Self-referral halves DNA rates', *Frontline* 1 May pp. 19-21 available at
28 <<http://www.csp.org.uk/frontline/article/self-referral-halves-dna-rates>>, accessed April
29 2016.
- 30
31 CSP. (2013), *Physiotherapy outpatient services survey 2012*, Chartered Society of
32 Physiotherapy, London, available from <<http://www.csp.org.uk>>, accessed April 2016.
- 33
34 CSP. (2009), *Self-Referral: Implementation Tools*, Chartered Society of Physiotherapy,
35 London.
- 36
37 DH. (2008), *Self-referral pilots to musculoskeletal physiotherapy and the implications for*
38 *improving access to other AHP services*, Department of Health, London.
- 39
40 DH. (2011), *Allied Health Professions (AHP) Service Improvement Project, Final Report*,
41 Department of Health, London, available from <<http://www.dh.gov.uk>>, accessed April
42 2016.
- 43
44 Dorning, H. and Bardsley, M. (2014), *Focus on: Allied health professionals: Can we measure*
45 *quality of care?* The Health Foundation and the Nuffield Trust, London, available from
46 <www.qualitywatch.org.uk>, accessed April 2016.
- 47
48 Drotz, E. and Poksinska, B. (2014), 'Lean in health care from employees' perspectives',
49 *Journal of Health Organization and Management*, Vol. 28 No. 2, pp. 177-195.
- 50
51 El-Tantawy, C., DiRe, A. and Frare, G. (2000), 'The challenge of managing patient
52 cancellation and non-attendance in an outpatient physiotherapy clinic', *Physiotherapy*
53 *Canada*, December, Vol. 52 No. 2, pp163-7.
- 54
55 Foote, J.L., North, N.H. and Houston, D.J. (2004), 'Towards a systemic understanding of a
56 hospital waiting list', *Journal of Health Organization and Management*, Vol. 18 No. 3,
57 pp. 140-154.
- 58
59 French, H., McGrane, E. and Cooke, G. (2005), 'A prospective study of non-attendance to a
60 physiotherapy outpatient department', *Physiotherapy Ireland*, Vol. 26 Iss. 1, pp. 16-22.
- 61
62 Gauld, G., Burgers, J., Dobrow, M., Minhas, R., Wendt, C., Cohen, A.B. and Luxford, K.
63 (2014), 'Healthcare system performance improvement', *Journal of Health*
64 *Organization and Management*, Vol. 28 No. 1 pp. 2 – 20.

- 1
2
3 Gijo, E.V., Antony, J., Hernandez, J. and Scaria, J. (2013), 'Reducing patient waiting time in
4 a pathology department using the Six Sigma methodology', *Leadership in Health*
5 *Services*, Vol. 26 No. 4, pp. 253-267.
- 6
7 Gollop, R., Whitby, E., Buchanan, D. and Ketley, D. (2004), 'Influencing sceptical staff to
8 become supporters of service improvement: a qualitative study of doctors' and
9 managers' views', *Quality and Safety in Health Care*, Vol. 13, pp.108-114.
- 10
11 Ham, C., Kipping, R. and McLeod, H. (2003), 'Redesigning Work Processes in Health Care:
12 Lessons from the National Health Service', *The Milbank Quarterly*, Vol. 81 No. 3, pp.
13 415-439.
- 14
15 Harding, P. (2011), 'Improve MSK Therapy Services by self-referral, condition specific
16 pathways and reduced waits', available at <[http://chain.ulcc.ac.uk/chain/documents/
17 AHPprojectPatrickHardingBarnesFINAL.doc](http://chain.ulcc.ac.uk/chain/documents/AHPprojectPatrickHardingBarnesFINAL.doc)>, accessed April 2016.
- 18
19 ~~Health Foundation. (2011), *Safer Patients Initiative*, The Health Foundation, London.~~
20
21 Health Foundation. (2013), *Improving Patient Flow*, The Health Foundation, London.
- 22
23 Holt, T.A., Thorogood, M., Griffiths, F., Munday, S., Friede, T. and Stables, D. (2010),
24 'Automated electronic reminders to facilitate primary cardiovascular disease
25 prevention: randomised controlled trial', *British Journal of General Practice*, April, pp.
26 e137-e143 DOI: [10.3399/bjgp10X483904](https://doi.org/10.3399/bjgp10X483904)
- 27
28 Hwang, P., Hwang, D. and Hong, P. (2014), 'Lean practices for quality results: a case
29 illustration', *International Journal of Health Care Quality Assurance*, Vol. 27 Iss. 8,
30 pp. 729 – 741.
- 31
32 IHI. (2005), *Going Lean in Healthcare*, Institute of Healthcare Improvement, Cambridge,
33 MA.
- 34
35 Jones D. and Mitchell, A. (2006) *Lean thinking for the NHS*, NHS Confederation, London.
- 36
37 Joosten, T., Bongers, I. and Janssen, R. (2009), 'Application of lean thinking to health care:
38 issues and observations', *International Journal for Quality in Health Care*, Vol. 21 No.
39 5, pp. 341-347.
- 40
41 Kaplan, R.S. and Porter, M.E. (2011), 'How to Solve the Cost Crisis in Health Care',
42 *Harvard Business Review*, September, pp. 47-64.
- 43
44 Khatami, A. and Rosengren, K. (2015), 'An improvement project within urological care',
45 *International Journal of Health Care Quality Assurance*, Vol. 28 No. 4, pp. 412 – 422.
- 46
47 Langley, A. (2009), 'Studying Processes in and Around Organizations', in Buchanan, D. and
48 Bryman, A. (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Research Methods*, Sage,
49 London, pp.409-429.
- 50
51 Langley, A. and Denis, J-L. (2011), 'Beyond evidence: the micropolitics of improvement',
52 *Quality and Safety in Health Care*, Vol. 20 (Suppl. 1), pp. i43-i46.
- 53
54 Liu, P.J., Wisdom, J., Roberto, C.A., Liu, L.J. and Ubel, P.A. (2014), 'Using Behavioral
55 Economics to Design More Effective Food Policies to Address Obesity', *Applied*
56 *Economic Perspectives and Policy*, Vol. 36 No. 1, pp.6-24.
- 57
58 Locock, L. (2003), 'Healthcare redesign: meaning, origins and application', *Quality and*
59 *Safety in Health Care*, Vol. 12, pp. 53-57.
- 60
61 Lodge, A. and Bamford, D. (2007), 'Health service improvement through diagnostic waiting
62 list management', *Leadership in Health Services*, Vol. 20 No. 4, pp. 254-265.
- 63
64 Loewenstein, G., Asch, D.A., Friedman, J.Y., Melichar, L.A. and Volpp, K.G. (2012), 'Can
65 behavioural economics make us healthier?' *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 344, p.
66 e3482.

- 1
2
3 Martin, S.J., Bassi, S. and Dunbar-Rees, R. (2012), 'Commitments, norms and custard
4 creams– a social influence approach to reducing did not attends (DNAs)', *Journal of*
5 *the Royal Society of Medicine*, No. 105, pp. 101–104.
- 6
7 Mazzocato, P., Savage, C., Brommels, M., Aronsson, H. and Thor, J. (2010), 'Lean thinking
8 in healthcare: a realist review of the literature', *Journal of Quality and Safety in Health*
9 *Care*, Vol. 19, pp. 376-382.
- 10
11 Mazzocato, P., Thor, J., Backman, U., Brommels, M., Carlsson, J., Jonsson, F., Hagmar, M.
12 and Savage, C. (2014), 'Complexity complicates lean: lessons from seven emergency
13 services', *Journal of Health Organization and Management*, Vol. 28 No. 2, pp. 266-
14 288.
- 15
16 McIntosh, B., Sheppy, B. and Cohen, I. (2014), 'Illusion or delusion – Lean management in
17 the health sector', *International Journal of Health Care Quality Assurance*, Vol. 27 No.
18 6, pp. 482 – 492.
- 19
20 Modernisation Agency. (2004), *10 High Impact Changes for Service Improvement and*
21 *Delivery*, NHS Modernisation Agency, Coventry.
- 22
23 NHS III. (2005), *Process mapping, analysis and redesign*, NHS Institute for Innovation and
24 Improvement, Coventry.
- 25
26 Øvretveit, J. (2004), 'A framework for quality improvement translation: understanding the
27 conditionality of interventions', *Joint Commission Journal on Quality and Safety*,
28 Global Supplement, pp. 15-24.
- 29
30 Øvretveit, J., Andreen-Sachs, M., Carlsson, J., Gustafsson, H., Hansson, J., Keller, C.,
31 Lofgren, S., Mazzocato, P., Tolf, S. and Brommels. M. (2012), 'Implementing
32 organisation and management innovations in Swedish healthcare: Lessons from a
33 comparison of 12 cases', *Journal of Health Organization and Management*, Vol. 26
34 No. 2, pp. 237-257.
- 35
36 Øvretveit, J. and Klazinga, N. (2012), 'Learning from large-scale quality improvement
37 through comparisons', *International Journal for Quality in Health Care*, Vol. 24 No. 5,
38 pp. 463–469.
- 39
40 Pawson, R. and Tilley, N. (1997) *Realistic Evaluation*, Sage, London.
- 41
42 Porter, M.E. and Lee, T.H. (2013) 'The strategy that will fix healthcare', *Harvard Business*
43 *Review*, Vol. 91 No. 10, pp. 51-70.
- 44
45 Powell, A.E., Rushmer, R.K. and Davies, H.T.O. (2009), *A systematic narrative review of*
46 *quality improvement models in health care*, NHS Quality Improvement Scotland,
47 Edinburgh.
- 48
49 Radnor, Z.J., Holweg, M. and Waring, J. (2012), 'Lean in healthcare: The unfilled promise?'
50 *Social Science and Medicine* 74, pp. 364-371.
- 51
52 Robinson, J. (2011), 'Self-Referral to Physiotherapy for Musculoskeletal Conditions: initially
53 with Drayton Practice, then with a view to extend across Portsmouth's remaining 28
54 practices', available at <[http://chain.ulcc.ac.uk/chain/documents/AHPproject](http://chain.ulcc.ac.uk/chain/documents/AHPprojectJoannaRobinsonSolent.doc)
55 [JoannaRobinsonSolent.doc](http://chain.ulcc.ac.uk/chain/documents/AHPprojectJoannaRobinsonSolent.doc)>, accessed April 2016.
- 56
57 Robson, C. (2011), *Real World Research*, Wiley, London.
- 58
59 Sanders, T., Ong, B.N., Sowden, G. and Foster, N. (2014), 'Implementing change in
60 physiotherapy: professions, contexts and interventions', *Journal of Health*
Organization and Management, Vol. 28 No. 1, pp. 96-114.
- Thorlby, R. and Maybin, J. (2010), *A High-Performing NHS? A review of progress 1997–*
2010, King's Fund, London.

- 1
2
3 Walshe, K. (2007), 'Understanding what works—and why—in quality improvement: the
4 need for theory-driven evaluation', *International Journal for Quality in Health Care*,
5 Vol.19 No. 2, pp. 57–59.
6
7 Walshe, K. (2009), 'Pseudoinnovation: the development and spread of healthcare quality
8 improvement methodologies', *International Journal for Quality in Health Care*, Vol.
9 21 No. 3, pp. 153–159.
10
11 Waring, J.J. and Bishop, S. (2010), 'Lean healthcare: Rhetoric, ritual and resistance', *Social
12 Science and Medicine*, Vol. 71, pp. 1332-1340.
13
14 WHO. (2009), *The European health report 2009: health and health systems*, World Health
15 Organization, Geneva.
16
17 WHO. (2012), *Health in the Americas*, World Health Organization, Geneva.
18
19 Young, T.P. and McClean, S.I. (2009), 'Some challenges facing Lean Thinking in
20 healthcare', *International Journal for Quality in Health Care*, Vol. 21 No. 5, pp. 309–
21 310.

22
23 **Table I:** Services attempting to implement opt-in systems and their outcomes

Service	Attempted opt-in systems	Outcome
A	An initial pilot in the service was followed by the system being rolled out to the whole team	Little effect on DNAs for three months, then a significant reduction (from 11% to 5%)
B	Piloted in one clinic successfully; attempted in two other clinics, with success in one but not in the other	In the first clinic, DNAs fell from over 20% to under 10%; there was a fall in waiting times from five to one to two weeks
C	Piloted by senior clinicians and then all the therapists asked to use opt-in	No impact on DNAs or waiting times after six months; after a further 11 months, DNAs declined from 14% to 10% - but other changes may have influenced outcomes
D	Introduced opt-in along with other changes to the service, including changing team structures and work flows	Service manager thought that opt-in had reduced DNAs by 3-4%, but other changes to the service may have influenced outcomes
E	Introduced in one small clinic, where DNAs were high and waiting times were long. Team leader thought it could not be rolled out to other clinics owing to a central appointment-booking service	DNAs reduced to five per two-month period, compared to over 20 in the previous year
F	Introduced into the whole service	Estimated effect was to reduce DNAs from 4.5% to 3%
G	Opt-in was tried as an experiment by two senior clinicians. Service manager reported that staff were doubtful about its effects and it was discontinued	No reported effect on DNAs or waiting times during trial period

24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

H	Opt-in was encouraged by the service manager, but she reported only a slow uptake by staff	No reported effect.
---	--	---------------------

Table II: DNAs at one site in Service B: change introduced in January Year 1, DNAs compared to the same months in the preceding year

%	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug
Year 1	17.5	9.4	10.4	8.6	6.3	9.6	7.7	10.9
Prior year	22.1	24.3	21.3	19.4	25.4	18.7	20.2	18.3

Table III: DNAs in Service A

DNA rate measured in ten week periods before (-1) and after opt-in							
Period	-1	1	2	3	4	5	6
	11%	11%	10%	9%	8%	5%	5%