Case study

Map of Medicine and low back pain: a pathway to better management

The Metro North Brisbane Medicare Local has a population of approximately 900,000 people, equating to 20% of Queensland’s population, with 286 general practices and 5 public hospitals.

The Medicare Local’s vision is a community where good health is available for everyone. The Medicare Local works with local primary health care providers, social services, community groups and the Metro North Hospital and Health Service to innovatively coordinate services.

The challenge

During a series of eight community forums to engage local people about their health and well-being, Metro North Brisbane Medicare Local identified that partnerships, collaboration and coordination between health services needed to be improved. Better health information including service information and referral, which would impact at an individual and community level, was also identified as a key area for improvement.

Despite evidence showing that less than 30% of patients with documented back pain require a specialist surgical opinion, with only 3-5% converting to surgery, low back pain had the highest orthopaedic referral rates and high numbers of patients on the Royal Brisbane & Women’s Hospital Neurosurgical and Orthopaedic Specialist Outpatient Clinic wait lists. The team therefore chose to focus on management of lower back pain as the first Map of Medicine pathway.

The solution

Metro North Brisbane Medicare Local and Metro North Hospital and Health Service created the Pathways Program, comprising a cross-section of experienced healthcare professionals (GPs, specialists, nurses, allied health professionals) to improve collaboration between primary, secondary and tertiary care.

A review of existing clinical care pathway software was undertaken, resulting in Map of Medicine being chosen to support the project. In addition to Map of Medicine’s reputation and strong support network, other highly regarded components for rollout to general practices are its ability to integrate with GP management software and the whole-of-system mapping capability.

“It will help us by improving the delivery of efficient services and the provision of care in the most appropriate setting. The Map of Medicine has the potential to reduce health inequalities and improve equity of access.”

Metro North Hospital & Health Service Board Chair, Dr Paul Alexander

“By coordinating the efforts of health professionals we can deliver better solutions to the problems faced by our communities.”

Medicare Local Board Chair, Professor Claire Jackson
As the priority, the group created the low back pain pathway.

**Project timeline**

**MAY 2013**
First clinical work groups established

**NOVEMBER 2013**
First 4 pathways published

**DEC 2013 – FEB 2014**
Approximately 60 GPs commenced pilot of Map of Medicine

**MARCH 2014**
Official launch of Map of Medicine

**OCTOBER 2014**
Low back pain most viewed pathway – 550 views

1. Pathway priorities identified through means of selection criteria and approved by the General Practitioner Liaison Officer (GPLO), Medicare Local and Map of Medicine Steering Committee

2. Working group creates a localised evidence-based, best practice pathway

3. Pathway is finalised after wider consultation and signed-off by the members of the working group, GPLO, Map of Medicine Steering Committee and the CEO of the Metro North Brisbane Medicare Local

4. Pathway is published on to Map of Medicine

**Benefits and results**

Health professionals involved in the Pathways Program appreciated the opportunity to work on the pathway development and saw real value in the collaborative approach.

The low back pain pathway is currently the most frequently accessed Metro North Brisbane pathway (550 views between March and October 2014).

“I enjoyed the experience, would recommend it to colleagues and would be happy to participate again in another pathway.”

Dr Andrew Springfield, GP, Everton Park

**Expected ongoing benefits from using Map of Medicine and implementing the pathway include:**

- Reduction of inappropriate/incomplete referrals for surgical review of non-specific back pain
- Increase in referrals to, and consultation with, other service providers e.g. pain services, musculoskeletal GPs, allied health (physiotherapists, psychologists etc)
- Increased multidisciplinary and community-based care for the management of non-specific back pain
- Decreased waiting list for non-specific back pain
- Identifying the need for more affordable community based programs focused around exercise and rehabilitation

- Increased equity of access and affordability of services for some patients (e.g. access to MRIs if the patient isn’t seeing a specialist)

An additional offshoot benefit realised from wider collaboration and communication across the health sectors is that all spinal referrals are now triaged by the Spinal Physiotherapy Screening Clinic in collaboration with the Neurosurgical and Orthopaedic Specialist Outpatient Clinics.

For more information about Map of Medicine please contact pandksales@medicaldirector.com or 1800 622 678.

For more information about this case study please contact Metro North Brisbane Medicare Local at carepathways@mnbml.com.au