

Pre-operative Assessment – the way ahead

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The Pre-operative assessment process ensures that patients are medically and socially evaluated for anaesthesia and surgery. Its aim should be assessment and preparation of all aspects of the “Patient’s Journey”, while coming for elective surgery. The pre-operative assessment visits create trust and confidence for patients by providing information about the operation and giving patients the opportunity to ask questions. It establishes that the patient is fully informed and wishes to undergo the procedure. Our Pre-op team at the Royal Liverpool University Hospitals, Liverpool, has demonstrated clinical excellence, innovation and high patient satisfaction, which led us to “Anaesthesia Team of the Year” award at the Hospital Doctor Awards 2005.

‘One-stop shops’

The ethos of the ‘one stop shop’ is that no patient should be listed until they have undergone assessment and have been deemed fit for surgery. We have introduced ‘one-stop shop’ clinics for foot and ankle surgery patients in 2003. These one-stop shops have been useful in reducing DNA rates, they increase patient choice, reduce the number of patient’s hospital journeys, and allow for discharge planning to start early in the patients journey.

Electronic Pre-operative assessment pathway

The electronic health records provide greater accessibility, accuracy and completeness of clinical information. They present a new approach to meet the growing demands of caring for the increasing numbers of patients with chronic conditions. Our team has developed an Electronic Pre-operative assessment pathway. It is a decision support system used by our team since 2005.

Delivering the 18 week patient pathway

With the development of patient pathways, the primary care should ensure that patients are only referred for elective surgery when they are fully fit to undergo surgical intervention. Wherever possible, an initial Health screening should be undertaken in the primary care ahead of the decision to refer to secondary care. There will be occasions, when the patient has a medical condition that needs investigation and treatment ahead of surgical intervention. It is inappropriate that the patient starts an elective pathway in this situation – rather the patient should be referred onto a pathway only when they are fit for surgery.

In order to deliver the 18 week patient pathway, Pre-operative Assessment must be at the forefront of organizational and clinical developments. The pre-op teams should design and deliver high performance pre-operative assessment service in the secondary care. Following an initial Pre-op screening in primary care, full Pre-operative assessment should be performed immediately following the decision to operate. We should develop our manpower and clinics (Pre-operative assessment clinics and Anaesthetic clinics) in establishing or developing 'one-stop pre-operative assessment clinics' alongside the surgical clinics.