

The impact of a physiotherapist led paediatric fracture clinic. Sharing the load of outpatient fracture care

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Background

Barwon Health's orthopaedic fracture clinic has historically been characterised by large patient numbers (an average 91 patients per clinic (01/07/2012 – 31/12/2012)) and long waits on the day of clinic (169 minutes in department per attendance). Barwon Health Physiotherapists have safely and successfully delivered advanced practice adult and paediatric orthopaedics clinics; consequently, the Victorian Paediatric Orthopaedic Network offered Barwon Health an opportunity to trial a Physiotherapist led paediatric fracture clinic (PFC) to help manage demand for outpatient paediatric fracture care.

Methods

A senior orthopaedic physiotherapist was recruited to define, scope and conduct the PFC. A second physiotherapist was recruited to work in one of two four-hour weekly PFC's. Scope of practice was developed with key stakeholders in Physiotherapy, Orthopaedics and Outpatients. The clinic was collocated with existing orthopaedic consultant led clinics for clinical support and access to on call trauma services. Clinical practice was supported by the Royal Children's Hospital paediatric fracture clinical practice guideline. The clinic was evaluated 6 months post commencement for impact on patient flow and safety.

Results

97% of all paediatric patients seen in the control group would meet the PFC inclusion criteria. PFC patients spent on average 83 minutes in the department compared with 150 minutes for Orthopaedic fracture clinic patients seen during the same time period, and 169 minutes for paediatric patients seen in the six months prior to the PFC commencing. No adverse events were identified. The PFC received recurrent funding.

Discussion

Physiotherapists can provide safe, timely care of paediatric patients presenting to outpatients with simple limb fractures. PFC requires the availability of onsite radiology and orthopaedic consultation for a sustainable, efficient and safe model. Early sustainability planning with regard to recruitment and training is essential to the success of the role as there currently no clear career/ education pathways into this area of physiotherapy advanced practice.