

Speech Pathology Occupational Therapy (SPOT) Allied Health Assistant: a patient flow initiative

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Background

Speech pathologists and occupational therapists are able to delegate certain tasks to an advanced allied health assistant. Delegation of these tasks enables health practitioners to provide specialist patient care to an increased number of patients, facilitating patient flow and improving patient outcomes.

Methods

From February to June 2015 the speech pathology and occupational therapy disciplines at Caboolture Hospital conducted a joint patient flow project. An advanced allied health assistant (AHA) was delegated the following clinical tasks historically performed by a health practitioner following training: home access visits, cognitive screening, language screening, initial screening of the home environment, therapy programs (limb ranging, swallowing exercises, oral motor strengthening tasks), and thickened fluid education.

Results

Implementation of the SPOT model of care resulted in significant service improvements. Some of these include:

- Provision of speech pathology services to an increased number of emergency department patient attendances (increase of 222%)
- Provision of speech pathology services to an increased number of medical patient attendances (increase of 295%)
- Increased the volume of home access visits occurring within a 24 hour period by 40%
- Increased the capacity of occupational therapists to perform initial assessments by 16.49%, self-care and physical assessments by 56.44%, cognitive and psychosocial assessments by 115.26%, and complex home visits by 53.79%

Discussion

The speech pathology occupational therapy (SPOT) allied health assistant model of care enabled improved team decision making within the emergency department to determine if patients required hospital admission; facilitated discharge of patients home from the emergency department and provided earlier intervention for those requiring inpatient admission; facilitated patient flow from the inpatient setting; and supported achievement of the National Stroke Foundation Guidelines for acute stroke management with implementation of therapy programs conducted by an AHA in the acute setting.