

Advanced practice in continence and women's health physiotherapy: a multi-site pilot

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Background

Accessibility to public specialists in urogynaecology is a problem Australia wide, with long waiting lists for both medical and physiotherapy appointments. Frequently patients are progressed to invasive investigations and surgical intervention before a conservative approach is trialled.

Advanced practice physiotherapists (APP) add value to outpatient surgical services through: leading triage, patient assessment/screening and determination of management/referral pathways, using advanced scope of practice skills standardised by the clinical competency framework. APP-led clinics decrease waiting lists, streamline patient flow, enhance surgeon/specialist time and increase patient and staff satisfaction.

This project aims to develop and implement an efficient, safe and effective model of Advanced Practice Continence and Women's Health Physiotherapy service at three implementation sites.

Methods

Steering committees were established at all sites, local implementation procedures for triage, clinical assessment/screening and referral were agreed, and clinicians were supported by a clinical competency framework for five advanced practice skills. APP-led models of care have commenced at three sites, with a further three sites planned.

Results

Two sites have implemented an APP-led clinic in urogynaecology. There were no adverse clinical incidents and patient and staff satisfaction was extremely high. At the other site, patients were required to have a medical appointment regardless, although the physiotherapy assessment generally preceded this.

Initial data suggests that more than 50% of patients could either be directly discharged or referred for a course of physiotherapy, reducing waiting lists and improving patient outcomes.

Discussion

Stakeholder engagement is key to the success of implementing an APP model of care in the urogynaecology setting. Barriers may include meeting referrer's expectations and medical colleagues confidence and trust in the physiotherapy skill-set. Initially establishing a multidisciplinary clinic model as a precursor to an advanced practice model may be useful in establishing trust and achieving advanced practice competency. APP-led clinics afford benefits to patients and staff alike.