

Streamlining access to falls and balance services

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Background

Northern Health offers two services for clients with falls and balance problems. It was identified that clients were being referred to services inappropriate to their needs and experiencing lengthy wait-times. A need was identified to streamline the referral pathway to rehabilitation services for clients with falls by having one point of entry. The aim of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a new falls pathway.

Method

Pathway changes include one point of entry, therapists review and prioritise all referrals. A retrospective before and after intervention study was conducted, inspecting wait-times and the number of admissions pre and post implementation of the new pathway for clients referred with falls and balance problems. Data were collected from implementation in December 2013 to May 2014 and compared to the same period 12 months prior. Clients and staff were surveyed to seek feedback relating to their experience via the new pathway. Clients interviewed were randomly selected by an independent assessor, while clinicians were provided with a questionnaire.

Results

Falls and balance service admissions increased from 57 to 162 clients within the respective periods. The average wait-time for clients was reduced from 93 to 45 days. Of the clients (n=15) interviewed, 89% were either very or extremely satisfied with the service. All clinicians (n=7) surveyed on the impact of the pathway agreed or strongly agreed that clients seen in the clinic are more appropriate.

Discussion

The pathway is effective in streamlining referrals to appropriate services, allowing for early assessment and treatment, and has reduced wait time for clients to access services. It has also achieved a high level of client and staff satisfaction. This provides a model of care for other specialist clinics to assist in client flow through services.