

A physiotherapy-led orthopaedic screening clinic: analysis of 5,000 appointments

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Background

Physiotherapy-led orthopaedic screening clinics are widely accepted in many public health systems in Australia and overseas as a cost-effective and high quality wait list management strategy.

The Northern Health physiotherapy-led orthopaedic screening clinic has been operating since 2007, assessing knee, shoulder and spinal pain. Anecdotally this led to improved access for patients who require orthopaedic review, however this has not been formally assessed over the long term.

Methods

Clinical audit data from the first 5000 appointments in the Orthopaedic screening clinic (2007-2015) was collected and analysed for number of referrals to the orthopaedic team, radiology arranged and patient outcome post orthopaedic review.

Results

Of the 5000 screening appointments offered in the audit period, 2645 were initial appointments that were attended by the patient, with 799 reviews. Of patients assessed, 24% were referred to the Orthopaedic surgeons for review. Of patients reviewed by the Orthopaedic surgeons, 75% went on to have interventions arranged.

Approximately two-thirds of patients assessed (66%) were referred for conservative management, primarily physiotherapy. Radiology was arranged in 375 cases (10.8% of appointments), 85% of which (n=318) were plain films.

Discussion

A physiotherapy-led orthopaedic screening clinic is effective at streamlining care for people with musculoskeletal shoulder and knee pain referred to the Northern Hospital Orthopaedic department.

Most patients referred to the Orthopaedic team have interventions arranged, suggesting that the screening clinic facilitates allocation of orthopaedic outpatient time to patients with the greatest need.

Of the 5000 appointments offered between January 2007 and April 2015, 87% (n=4356) either required no orthopaedic review or failed to attend the screening clinic, representing a considerable saving in medical time. Combined with low radiology costs, this clinic is a highly cost-effective strategy for management of the Orthopaedic waiting list, with consistent high quality results over the long term.