



The electronic referral is one of the most frequently used tools of the patient information system. Reliable referral information reflects the work in specialized care: the people who commission work, the type of work and the urgency of the requests. The analysis of referrals is a key factor influencing the development of operations and resource allocation.

In the Finnish central hospital, the Hospital District of Central Ostrobothnia, tens of thousands of referrals are transferred between specialized fields annually, processed by hundreds of health care professionals. Obtaining commensurate material is problematic if the processing of referrals and consultation differ not only by hospital district but also within the hospital.

The analysis of existing operating models was launched as an internal investigation, and the objective is to go through the referral practices of tens of units and make the recommendations of the particular hospital group and the hospital's own practices consistent. Already after analyzing the first units, it was noticed that the referral practices were quite disorganized, and the organization did not have enough resources to sort them out, to create common practices or to train personnel.

Well-defined responsibilities and recording guidelines

With the support of Tieto's consultation, the referral practices and recording methods used in the central hospital were standardized, and the personnel were instructed in the implementation of the new standards.

An essential target for development was the clarification of the distribution of responsibilities: once it is clear who enters the recordings and at what stage they are made, duplicated work will decrease. During the developing and standardizing procedures, it was ensured that the information system provides efficient support for the hospital's own operations and work processes. Referral process training will be a continuous activity which is recorded in the hospital's annual schedule.

Examples

Pekka Nikula, head of the operative results centre, describes the monitoring of care guarantee as being the talk of the day in healthcare. "Statistics will in the future also meet grass-root level requirements. Monitoring our day-to-day work ensured that the agreed practices will serve us - the clinical workers. The guidelines now include documentation of all essential issues in the work phases," says Chief Surgeon Nikula.

Referral consultation is a step towards the implementation of a new generation reporting tool. Together with Tieto, the Hospital District of Central Ostrobothnia has actively developed the new comprehensive reporting service. Issues and processes can be reviewed in relation to each other during a selected period, so that the effect of interventions can be assessed.

"Units are better able to analyze their operations when data can be retrieved and analyzed with proper tools on the basis of referrals recorded in the agreed manner. After training, categorization of referrals has clearly improved and the relative number of referral types has

become more reasonable," confirms the hospitals district's Planning Manager Hannu Pikkarainen.

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