Streamline the workflow of linen handling in Physiotherapy Department of the Hong Kong Buddhist Hospital

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Introduction
The attendance of out-patient physiotherapy services of the Hong Kong Buddhist Hospital has been significantly increasing from 2010/11 to 2013/14 by 173%. Usage of linen items was also raised in proportion with the patient volume. The average number of various linen items used was about 1000 pieces/week. Procedures in handling used linen included that staff with personal protective equipment collected the used linen from different venues for counting, recording, and packing them to bags for collection. Procedures had to be completed in the clinical area before clinical service started due to limited space. However, schedule was further tightened with shortened work period after the alignment of conditioned work hours for supporting staff. Hence, a new program was implemented to streamline the workflow on handling linen.

Objectives
The objectives of this program were 1) to speed up the process in handling the used linen, 2) to minimize the risk of cross infection to patient and staff, and 3) to minimize the cost of manual handling operation for staff.

Methodology
This was a CQI project reviewing the linen handling process with 5 Key Sources of Variations. It included: 1) People - manpower; 2) Procedures - workflow and frequency of the process; 3) Measurements - quantity of used linen, time needed; 4) Policies - change of work hours, measures required by infection control guideline; 5) Place - problems raised in such practice at the venue. A few areas for improvement were identified with subsequent recommendations. A simplified workflow using a counter device and revised record form were implemented accordingly. In addition, a cabinet was installed for better storage.
**Result**
After the implementation of the new program, the average time spent in handling used linen reduced from 44.8 minutes to 14.2 minutes (mean differences: 30.6 minutes, 67%). The new workflow not only greatly improved the efficiency in the procedures, but also with positive feedback from the staff concerned. The enhanced workflow is effective in speeding up the procedure of linen handling. It also minimized the risk of infection to our staff and patients and reduced the cost of manual handling operation. Through making proper analysis, operational loop holes and possible risks could be reduced even with some simple changes.