Making the impossible possible - Tang Shiu Kin Hospital Pharmacy waiting time

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Introduction
Long waiting time is a significant issue in Tang Shiu Kin (TSK) pharmacy as the average waiting time has reached 3 hours since 2009. This has aroused attention and incessant patients’ complaints. TSK pharmacy serves various departments and clinics under Hospital Authority and Department of Health. An upward trend in the number of prescriptions is shown since 2006, from 560 prescriptions to 800 prescriptions in average per day. Heavy workload, poor staff morale and inefficient pharmacy workflow inevitably lead to long waiting time and potential medication errors. We foresee the worsening of the situation and measures are implemented to resolve the problem.

Objectives
1. To improve pharmacy waiting time by re-engineering the workflow at TSK pharmacy department
2. To further enhance and safeguard patient and medication safety
3. To create a harmonious working environment by boosting team work spirit and promoting good staff morale

Methodology
An explicit review is conducted in the areas that cause delays within the pharmacy and potential dispensing errors: 1. Dispensing system - all labels are generated in one printer which causes congestion in the drug picking process and possible dispensing error. In December 2012, Express Dispensing System is implemented to enhance the efficiency of dispensing. Four dispensing label printers are allocated at various dispensing stations which reduce staff movement and facilitate drug picking process. Pharmacist can oversee drug picking performance at different stations; reduce
mediation errors by separating sound-a-like, look-a-like and multiple strength medications. 2. Revise dispensing roster- identifying peak hours and non-peak hours for manpower deployment. Each session in vetting prescriptions, picking and issuing medications is extended from 20 minutes to 45 minutes. This can reduce time-lag when staff is switching task. 3. Revise drug labeling -full drug description and detailed location code are incorporated on the label. An explicit drug location code list is placed at dispensing and storage area to ensure correct drugs are picked from shelves. 4. Improvement in pharmacy layout □ Reorganize pharmacy area by relocating unused dispensing shelves to outpatient section and adding mobile drug shelf at the rear of the pharmacy. This shortens traveling time and enhances efficiency □ Re-engineer designated pharmacy waiting area with the use of clear signage and fixed stanchions to collect their medicines in an orderly manner □ Extra dispensing counter is fully utilized thus patients can collect their medications efficiently 5. Encourages team members to work closely together and provide suggestion to improve the service. Appreciation culture and positive practice environment are built up. Pharmacy members also collaborate closely with doctors, nurses and other department units and seek their advises to enhance patients’ services.

Result
After re-engineering the entire workflow for the pharmacy department and enhancement of teamwork spirit, the average waiting time has drastically reduced from 3 hours to 30 minutes, more than 80% reduction in waiting time. Compliments and appreciation letters have been received. Pharmacy staff is rewarded and recognized for this tremendous outcome and this ultimately gives patients and pharmacy staff a better quality of life after all.