



Service Priorities and Programmes Electronic Presentations

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The Role of Information Technology in the Timely Management of Paediatric Dermatology Patients

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Introduction

The wait-times are long, the patients are grumpy and the doctors are weary. In a world where resources are scarce and manpower is limited, it is vital for us to prioritize and allocate our assets sensibly to provide the best care we have to our patients based on patient needs. Although currently With the easy availability of information and communication technologies, it is our belief that precious man-hours can be saved in areas ranging from the labour-intensive triage process to patient communication processes.

Objectives

This study aims to look into how the introduction of basic information and communication technology can help to streamline triage and patient communication processes to allow timely management of patients based on their needs. The choice of a dedicated email system for this purpose was made based on the following objectives: 1) Optimize triage time for patients depending on their needs 2) Ease of access to users in all locations 3) Ease of communication requiring minimal expertise from referrers 4) Integration with existing hospital information and communication technology systems 5) Secure and private system ensuring safety of private data 6) Support of large sized files especially of images 7) Automatic reply system to ensure that patients and referrers will not mistakenly utilize the system as communication with the department 8) Convenient and retrievable data 9) Minimal expertise required in training of new users 10) Support of research activities

Methodology

This retrospective study's implementation was a collaboration between medical staff, nursing staff, information technology specialists and outpatient clinical staff. The study made use of a unique email account accessible only by authorized personnel. Additional storage data and retrieval of more dated emails was achieved with the help of information technology specialists. Data was obtained and categorized into

referral letters and gratitude letters by dedicated nursing staff. Data was retrieved spanning from December 2013 to December 2015. Paper-based referral letters were notated and sorted out with their associated emails and subsequently screened by a team of specialized medical staff.

Result

Results 634 new email cases were referred to our unit, in which 418 cases included photos in their referral emails. 10 other cases had hard copy photos sent separately. 289 of these cases had their appointments advanced from the emails. 239 cases had laser treatment arranged based on the photos, while 27 cases had other investigations or treatments (e.g. skin biopsy, minor surgery, imaging etc.) arranged.

Outcome A picture is worth a thousand words. It cannot be more true in the field of Paediatric Dermatology where textual description is inadequate even for the most verbally adept professionals. Implementation of information technology in Paediatric Dermatology permits caregivers to more accurately assess and triage cases, tailor-make management plans, and thereby providing timely diagnosis and treatment of each individual patient. Feedback from patients and their families were overwhelmingly positive, with significant impact in the psychologically and social well-being of the developing child. The timely diagnosis of certain diseases including a case of Langerhans cell histiocytosis also highlights the benefits of this innovative arrangement. In the future we hope to streamline the process, expand our service to allow videos and other formats, and further introduce this method to more hospitals and departments.