

Royal Free London Emergency General Surgery Service

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Background to the Project and Case for Change:

In 2012 Royal Free London Hospital started to develop a dedicated emergency general surgery service.

The previous service used 20 consultants of various disciplines providing 24 hour cover for the general surgical take. Consultant surgeons were supportive of improving the emergency general surgery service both for patients and clinicians, as night working was very demanding on all doctors in training and patients.

The Solution:

- A one year pilot was started in 2012 with two dedicated emergency general surgery consultants being appointed to provide cover between 08.00 and 21.00.
- Out-of-hours cover was provided by eight dedicated consultants replacing 20 consultants of various disciplines for the general surgical take.
- In 2013 the emergency general surgery service was expanded to four dedicated consultants and access to a 24 hour emergency theatre was established, which enabled the hospital to meet the London quality standard relating to immediate availability of an emergency theatre. Emergency general surgery patient care was handed over to the duty consultant on Friday evenings and Monday mornings.
- Patients undergoing a laparotomy remained under the care of the operating surgeon.
- Combined with the out-of-hours cover by the additional eight emergency general surgery consultants, the service now provides consistent seven day care.

Impact:

- At the end of the one year pilot the hospital saw a reduction in average length of stay for emergency general surgery patients from 6.7 to 4.3 days.
- The early benefits and fully engaged clinical and support teams, caused the emergency general surgery service to expand to four dedicated consultants.
- The unit admits approximately 1,400 patients per year, with 400 referred to other specialties and with 70 per cent of referrals occurring within 48 hours.
- The average period from admission to review by a consultant has decreased to 8.1 hours during weekdays and 12.4 hours on the weekend.
- The new service saw a reduction in average length of stay from 4.3 days to 2.8 days.

Three London Quality Standards are now met:

- Immediate availability of an emergency theatre.
- All emergency admissions to be seen and assessed by a relevant consultant within 12 hours.
- Consultant-led twice daily ward rounds, seven days per week.



Lessons Learnt and Going Forward:

- There is a need to overcome resistance to change in order to improve the emergency general surgery service and provide more supervision for doctors in training.
- Support must also be obtained from the consultant team of various disciplines and the self-interests of generalists and specialists shouldn't prevent change.