Title: Improving patient communication in a 4+1 schedule: building a standardized lab follow-up protocol

Abstract:

Statement of the Problem: An increasing focus on duty hour restrictions has led to restructuring of many residency program schedules. One such schedule is the 4+1 approach that alternates traditional rotations with a weeklong continuity clinic. This has posed particular challenges for residents in following up labs ordered during a clinic block. Prompt follow-up of labs obtained during clinic visits is essential for quality patient care and communication. Previously there was no standardized method by which labs were followed up in our resident clinic. This has resulted in instances of delayed notification of lab results impacting important diagnostic and therapeutic decision-making.

QI Approach: We aimed to improve the follow-up rate on patient lab results to 100% within 5 days of lab draw. Our scope was limited to same-day, basic labs and excluded imaging. Follow-up was defined as attempted communication with all returned labs. Stakeholder discussions and process mapping emphasized the need for a standardized approach to follow-up. A baseline, retrospective chart audit was performed in July 2014. A baseline survey was performed to assess perspectives. A standardized method of documenting follow-up was designed and optimized using a variety of approaches over 3 PDSA cycles.

Outcomes: Baseline retrospective chart audit of 85 patients conducted in July 2014 showed lab follow-up of 85% with an average 2.7 labs per visit and 2.7 days to follow-up. We designed 3 types of data tracking forms. Within the study period Nov 2014 - Mar 2015, 333 encounters with lab orders were recorded. Of these, 319/333 had documented follow-up (95%). The most common reasons for delay 1) ambiguity in responsibility for follow-ups; 2) labs with result times that exceeded 5 days (HCV genotyping); 3) no documented follow-up. A pre- and post-test survey of residents showed an improvement in perception and confidence of follow up (60% to 100% and 90% to 100%, respectively). The addition of a simple, common electronic document for recording and tracking lab follow-up resulted in >10% increase in overall lab follow-up.

Next Steps: We plan to expand by tracking imaging and non-same-day labs.