

A Success Story...

BETTER ACCESS MONDAYS: Spreading the load across the week

Access: Matching practice capacity to re-shaped demand

Brighton Medical Clinic - VIC

Brighton Medical Clinic introduced 'Better Access Mondays' to improve availability of appointments to patients ringing on a Monday. Better Access Mondays was implemented for a period of three months, before expanding the practice's learnings from Better Access Mondays across the entire week.

Better Access has resulted in patients feeling reassured and confident they can get an appointment on the day and they can (usually) see their doctor of choice. In addition, staff morale has improved considerably and doctors are more likely to get away on time.



Context

Brighton Medical Clinic is located in the affluent seaside suburb of Brighton in Melbourne. It is located within RRMA 1. There are approximately 21,000 active patients on the database, with a high number of young families and older people and a high incidence of chronic disease.

There are 15 GPs (5.2 GP FTE), one Practice Manager, two Practice Nurses, an Office Manager and 12 Practice Staff. The Clinic is open seven days, with approximately 750 appointments available per week.

The Situation

Before the introduction of Better Access Mondays at Brighton Medical Clinic, Mondays were a nightmare, according to Practice Manager Melinda Brown.

"We were totally booked out before the day with high numbers of incoming calls wanting appointments for Monday. The doctors were running hours behind," she said.

To further understand the situation, an analysis of a typical Monday was undertaken. The results indicated that Monday's had the highest number of pre-bookings and also the highest number of people wanting an appointment on the day. This had a negative impact on staff stress levels and patients were unhappy with the long waiting periods and not being able to get an appointment on their day of choice with their doctor of choice.

The decision to expand Better Access across the entire week was made following the overwhelming success of Better Access Mondays. Brighton Medical Clinic decided to roll out Better Access across all days to improve levels of patient care and availability of appointments on offer.

"Better Access has enabled Brighton Medical Clinic to develop and refine an effective and structured appointment system."

The Change

Brighton Medical Clinic went about implementing Better Access Mondays by analysing pre-booked appointments and categorising them, so that types of appointments could be easily identified. Reception staff received training in triage to enable appointments to be appropriately booked.

"We wanted to spread the load onto the days where we could cope with it," Melinda said.

Doctor education also occurred, with doctors encouraged to say to patients 'come back and see me next Wednesday or Thursday' rather than saying 'come back and see me next week'.

To facilitate these changes, two PDSA cycles were undertaken:

1. *To improve access and availability to appointments on a Monday by not booking follow ups and reviews on this day*

Plan: To ask reception staff and GP's to schedule follow ups and reviews for Wednesday.

Do: This began on the first week of August 2006 and we have been slowly working on this.

Study: We have seen so far a greater availability of appointments for patients telephoning the surgery and wanting to be seen on a Monday.

Act: We will actively continue to schedule our follow ups for a Wednesday.

2. *To educate the doctors re follow up and non urgent appointments*

Plan: At the clinical meeting on 15/11/06 the Practice Manager will explain the access problem we have and try to encourage all doctors to ask their patients to make a follow up appointment (if required) on a Wednesday rather than Monday or Tuesday.

Do: The above was carried out.

Study: Positive reaction from all the doctors at the meeting. Everyone will try and follow where possible these guidelines.

Act: Practice Manager to remind the doctors about follow up appointments on a Wednesday.

The other strategy implemented was to keep an hour free of appointments for each doctor, per session. With seven doctors working Mondays, 14 hours of appointments can now be catered for. To implement this change, the following PDSA was undertaken:

If blocking out 1hr sections of the appointment grid on a Monday for all GP's at different times of the day will help us to cope with the demand for appointments on a Monday.

Plan: Practice Manager to block out 1hr sections of the appointment grid on a Monday for all GP's at different times of the day for the month of November 2006.

Do: This was completed on Monday 30th October 2006 by the Practice Manager.

Study: Reception staff have been alerted to this new system and recognise we have an access issue on a Monday and will help.

Act: We will study again at the end of November and may need to add a new cycle (if required).

"We wanted to spread the load onto the days where we could cope with it."

*Melinda Brown,
Practice Manager*

The Change *continued...*

These changes were communicated to patients over the telephone. Reception staff advised patients to ring the clinic at 8am and informed patients that they would be able to get an appointment for that day (or the next), generally with the doctor of their choice.

The only problem encountered was from patients ringing at other times during the day and asking why they couldn't be offered an appointment then. Reception staff continued to advise patients to ring in at 8am, as at that time they would be able to guarantee an appointment.

Brighton Medical Clinic confirms all appointments the night before and inevitably there are always cancellations, which is another way of freeing up appointments for the following day.

The Outcome

Better Access has been in place now for 12 months.

"I don't know where we would be if we hadn't done it. Mondays in particular are lovely now; the biggest challenge is to stop the temptation of putting people in because there are free appointments," said Melinda.

Overall, Better Access has been extremely successful. The highlight of Better Access according to Melinda is "being able to implement change across the board everyday and using the Collaboratives methodology to manage our appointment system".

Better Access has enabled Brighton Medical Clinic to develop and refine an effective and structured appointment system, that enables the practice to effectively manage appointments when GPs are on leave and when GPs call in sick. Appointments are available seven days per week, across the operating hours of 8.30am to 7.00pm.

In addition, 'save for emergency' appointments have also been introduced. Two appointments per GP are set aside for emergencies and are not released until 6.00pm. This also provides the practice with room to move if there are no other available appointments.

The move to Better Access has had an extremely positive impact on patients. Patients can usually see the GP of their choice at a time that suits them.

Plans for the future include ongoing and continuous education for staff about the importance of triaging calls and ensuring that patients are existing patients of the practice.

Support Material

The Division's triage tool was used to help educate reception staff during the introduction of Better Access Mondays. It continues to be used today.

Information from the Collaboratives Handbook and from the Learning Workshop breakout sessions was also valuable.

Brighton Medical Clinic will continue with Better Access and would be happy to share their knowledge with other practices contemplating the Better Access journey.

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