

A geographical case study of two primary care nursing triage systems in Wales

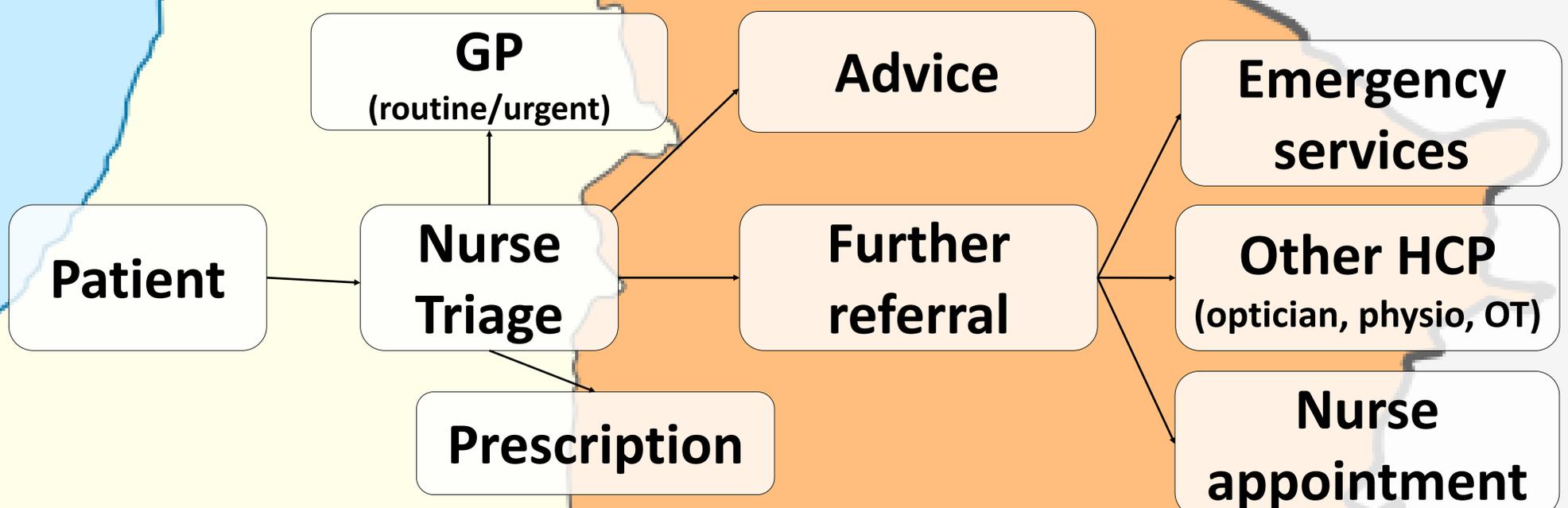
Background: A General Practice workforce crisis is emerging (Dayan, Arora, Rosen & Curry, 2014), with fewer medical professionals training as General Practitioners (GPs) and more GPs working part-time and planning to retire early. Optimising the workforce, by changing the way that primary care services are run, could help to resolve the imbalance between GP supply and demand (Osborn & Thompson, 2014). One way to relieve GP pressures may be introduction of a triage system, in which “calls from a person with a healthcare problem are received, assessed and managed by giving advice or by referral to a more appropriate service” (Lattimer, 1996).

Aim: To present a geographical case study of two nurse triage systems delivered in primary care in a GP cluster in South Powys in Wales.

Nurse-led Triage: Nurse triage service for requests for same-day appointments with the GP. This triage system was piloted across all GP surgeries in South Powys from December 2015 to November 2017.

Total Nurse Triage: Appointment Requests for same-day appointments and routine appointments are triaged by the nurse. This was piloted in one GP surgery within South Powys from March 2017 to October 2017.

Method: Reports were created to identify the number/type of triage encounters, clinical outcome of encounter, patient age and sex using EMIS web clinical system.



“Happy with the new triage system and I didn’t need to take any time off work to sit in the surgery, which was a bonus” – Triage patient

Results:

- Clinical outcomes were identified for 100% of triage encounters. The triage system was accessed by patients across the lifespan and by males and females.
- Less than half (45.57%) of triage encounters were referred on for contact with the GP, resulting in avoidance of 10,940 GP appointments.
- The Total Nurse Triage system was effective in reducing GP routine appointment waiting times, identifying clinical priorities to be seen urgently, increasing patient satisfaction and decreasing rates of non-attendance during the pilot period.

Impact:

This paper illustrates how nurse triage for both same day appointments and routine appointments have positive outcomes, including:

- Patients can access immediate support from a nurse.
- Reduced pressures on GP surgeries, shorter patient waiting times, lower non-attendance rates.
- Identification of high-risk individuals who need urgent attention.
- Increased patient satisfaction.

This model can be used to redistribute work, reduce strain within GP surgeries and enhance patient experience.

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