

Case study



Making the move to a seven day service – managing the operational change process

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Introduction

Lucy, Team Lead Occupational Therapist (OT) at Morriston Hospital, Swansea Bay University Health Board, shared reflections on their journey to develop and expand occupational therapy services across inpatient wards and the Emergency Department (ED) from five to seven days a week. The main areas for development were process and pathways to enhance the patient journey, early intervention, patient outcomes, integrated care, access to and equity of service provision. At the time of writing, the seven days working cover is embedded within the service with ongoing and regular evaluation.

The challenge

To develop and expand seven days working services within occupational therapy and physiotherapy at an acute district general (Morriston) hospital, focusing on weekend cover on inpatient wards (Medical and Trauma and Orthopaedics) and the Emergency Department (ED). The aim of the project was to provide the equity of therapy cover across seven days and positively impact on patient outcomes. A review of literature and benchmarking with other health boards highlighted the positive impact of seven day working on patient flow and patient outcomes. In addition, a pilot provided local data and evidence of the impact of seven days therapy cover.

The change

The impetus came from the Chief Executive in collaboration with the consultants within the health board. An initial seven days working pilot ran for two months (September 2021 – October 2021). OTs and physiotherapists volunteered for weekend shifts on an overtime basis during the pilot. Data was collected which included the number of patients seen on the weekend, number of patient discharges on a weekend and number of patient discharges on a Monday. All OT staff involved in the project contributed to the data gathering. Therefore, they could see the numbers of patients seen and outcomes, which provided positive feedback, evidenced the value of the project and allowed for buy in when whole scale change is being presented.

Key advice shared from project learning

- Staff engagement at the earliest opportunity is crucial in accepting change, managing anxiety and stress and ensuring staff are supported through the process.
- A rota that is developed with staff is essential to enable change and allow shift of thinking and working to seven days from a traditional five day model.
- Group OT engagement sessions and peer support are helpful to answer questions, provide feedback and reduce anxieties.
- Implementing change is time consuming and therefore patience is essential.
- Management tools for example Plan, Do, Study, Act cycle⁽¹⁾, are helpful in reviewing and evaluating stages so appropriate changes can be made depending on any feedback and or concerns raised.

Reference

1. [NHS England and NHS Improvement Quality, Service Improvement and Redesign Tools: Plan, Do, Study, Act \(PDSA\) cycles and the model for improvement 2022 Layout 1 \(england.nhs.uk\) \(accessed 09/05/2023\).](#)

Pilot data evidenced the benefit of seven day occupational therapy services and informed business cases to secure permanent funding and additional staff to provide the service in the longer-term. This data was used by site leads to engage in an operational change process (OCP) and formalise the permanent change to seven days working. The weekend volunteer rota was extended to the end of August 2022 whilst the OCP was being completed.

During the OCP process and the pilot itself, regular multi-disciplinary team 'group engagement' sessions were held to discuss planning and provide an opportunity for discussion, sharing ideas and raising any concerns the staff involved had. Review sessions with the staff involved in seven days working have continued to evaluate the outcomes and allow a platform to discuss ideas and share concerns.

For Lucy the 'in house' engagement sessions run by OT leads at Morriston Hospital provided valuable information and learning on managing people, expectations, dealing with conflict and dealing with change. Support sessions run by the learning and development team were also key for supporting staff through the change process.

“Developing rapport and having open and transparent conversations with staff have made things so much easier in terms of planning and implementing the change. Most staff had similar apprehensions about the development of seven days working and therefore discussion around this helped with reducing anxieties and managing change”.

Lucy

Key learning

Reflections on the most challenging aspects of the project during this phase included: the OCP process itself, expectations of the health board versus expectations of the staff involved, the volunteer weekend rota, the change process and feelings of uncertainty about service provision amongst staff especially in relation to work life balance and adjusting to new ways of working.

Following the pilot and OCP, the seven days service permanently began in September 2022.

Learning so far

- The pilot was essential to collect data, provide evidence to inform business cases to secure long-term funding of the service.
- The operational change process took longer than initially expected.
- Regular staff engagement was essential to the success of implementing seven day working.
- The pilot improved equity of service provision to patients across seven days.
- From the statistics collected, occupational therapy have been able to discharge patients on weekends and early discharges in the week.
- Early access, assessment and intervention in the patients journey to ensure they only stay in an acute hospital for the minimum amount of time needed to address their acute needs.
- Staff involvement in the rota allows for empowerment and ownership.

The things that really helped to move the project forward

- Permanent funding support from Chief Executive for additional staff needed to provide a seven days service.
- Development of database systems to identify and collect qualitative and quantitative data which has continued to support improvements and changes.
- Review sessions which have allowed feedback and reflection of the process.

Key changes and impacts to date

To date the data collected has shown positive changes in equity of therapy cover across seven days, providing therapy sessions for patients on the weekends as well as during the week. The OTs have been able to discharge patients on the weekends and earlier during the week, ensuring every day is maximised in the patient's journey.

Having therapy staff over seven days has allowed assessments to commence at the earliest opportunity and has allowed staff to better manage their caseload. The seven days service offers patients access to occupational therapy in the emergency department and allows ongoing referrals and equipment provision at the 'front door' to allow safe discharge home without the need for admission. This starts the assessment and intervention journey at the earliest point before transfer to downstream wards if required.

Initial anxieties from staff members throughout the OCP have reduced with the implementation and first-hand experience of seeing the benefits and positive patient outcomes across seven day working.

Multi-disciplinary team feedback has highlighted the benefits to patients accessing the service and better communication and rapport being developed with families, patients and the multi-disciplinary team due to increased contact with the service and providing continuity of care across seven days.

Next steps

The seven days occupational therapy service continues as a permanent service with ongoing review. The next review date is May 2023. Specific protocols developed for the occupational therapy team for working at weekends (including a handover protocol) continue to evolve.

Contact the innovation hub for more information

If you would like further information about this case study or project, please contact the RCOT innovation hub team at innovationhub@rcot.co.uk. We respectfully request that you do not contact Lucy or her team individually as we are collating correspondence on their behalf.

“It's about supporting each other as we are all going through the same change and experiences”.

Lucy

“The one thing I would take away from this experience, is that things do need to be reviewed and not everything you put in place does work, you can't really implement anything from the start and expect it to be perfect. Having this mind-set has really helped in reducing staff anxieties and allows participation in service development”.

Lucy

“Working seven days means that if a patient needs extra support from other services, the OT team can get that referral in a little earlier and patients feel a bit more comfortable knowing there's a plan. Having access to occupational therapy input over seven days allows realistic expectations and discharge plans to be agreed with our patients which increases confidence and allows for patient autonomy”.

Lucy