Orthopaedic triaging by podiatrists: A prospective study of patient satisfaction and service efficiency

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Background
The Southern Adelaide Local Health Network is serviced by one Orthopaedic Surgeon specialising in Foot and Ankle Surgery. In 2011, the outpatient (OPD) waiting list to see the Surgeon at the Repatriation General Hospital was expanding and the need for assistance was growing. The Department of Podiatry agreed to provide a podiatrist to assist in the management of the OPD waiting list. Whilst treatment outcome is an important measure, we were interested in evaluating the service with respect to how satisfied patients were with seeing a podiatrist. The primary aim of this study was therefore to evaluate patient satisfaction with podiatry-led clinics for the Orthopaedic waiting list. Secondary outcomes included discharge rate and efficiency of care.

Methods
We prospectively recruited a consecutive sample of patients discharged from the Department of Podiatry between 1st May to 1st November 2013 to complete the client satisfaction survey (CSQ-8). This survey was used to evaluate the satisfaction of patients following discharge from the Department of Podiatry. The number of appointments required to see the podiatrist was a surrogate marker for service efficiency and the discharge rate was calculated as the number of patients discharged from the Department of Orthopaedics.

Results
There were 49 patients, 16 men and 33 women who enrolled in the survey during the 6-month period. Patients waited for a mean of 241.6 days (range 32-551) for their initial appointment. Of the 49 patients discharged, 21 (43%) were discharged from the OPD waiting list. 28 (57%) of patients were referred onto the Department of Orthopaedics for opinion and management. The mean number of appointments for each patient was 1.3 +/- 0.6

The quality of the service was reported by 44/49 (89%) as excellent, 40/49 (81%) reported they definitely received the kind of service they wanted, 41/49 (83%) would definitely recommend a friend to the service and 45/49 (91%) stated they would definitely return to the service.

Conclusions
A podiatrist, working at an extended scope of practice and in collaboration with an Orthopaedic Surgeon, can successfully and efficiently assess and treat patients on an OPD waiting list.