



Creating a better care environment

Philips Utilization Services helps Skåne University Hospital reduce patient waitlists and staff stress

Who/where

Skåne University Hospital,
Lund Sweden
Regional and university hospital:
980 beds
Serves about 75,000 outpatients
per year

Challenge

Lund hospital had a waitlist of over 14 weeks for their MRI examinations, which was too long for patients and stressful for staff.

Solution

The Imaging and Functional Diagnostic Center of Skåne University Hospital carried out a Kaizen Event, coordinated by Philips Healthcare. The project team implemented a number of process changes that have significantly improved the operational efficiency in the imaging department. The waiting list and staff stress levels have been reduced.

Skåne University Hospital in Lund, Sweden recently carried out an intensive project to improve the working environment of their MR department. With the help of Philips Utilization Consulting, the hospital's Imaging and Functional Diagnostic Center used a *Kaizen Event* to make smarter and better use of resources in their MRI department. Kaizen is a way of thinking, a philosophy that comes from Japan, which stands for improvement. The result is shorter patient waitlists and less stress on imaging staff.

A Philips Kaizen Event lasts one week and aims for a rapid improvement in a single burst of change. The "Kaizen team" included doctors, radiographers, and administrative staff, working together with Philips consultants. This approach complemented the hospital's own Lean Quality program. The goal for both programs is for employees to develop improvements as a natural part of their job, bringing about change and improvement in small steps every day. Both Lund and Philips focus on what is truly beneficial for the patients and what changes will add the most value for everyone.

Think big - do small

The MRI department at Skåne University Hospital uses four MRI systems to handle its high number of in-house and outpatients. Despite the hard working staff, the waiting time for an MRI exam was generally 14 weeks or more for outpatients. The hospital management was facing possible government fines if this period could not be reduced.

"Think big - do small," says clinic director Peter Hochberg. "I like to say that it is not OK to get to work and do the same thing the same way, every day for five years. Our mission is to constantly think, adding that extra value to the customer, who are our patients and referring physicians. It is our mission, a constant value."

The hospital brought in Philips to help them find areas for improvement and to start to make that change. Philips conducted a Kaizen event, which required having the entire staff on board. If every day, every employee can find something small that can be done a little better, this can produce surprisingly big results over time. These should not be large improvements, but rather small incremental improvements.

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PHILIPS
sense and simplicity

Objective data drives Kaizen Event

Philips began the project by looking at the Utilization Reports. By using the existing connection for Philips Remote Services, Philips collects objective data on system utilization, including system idle time, intervals between scans, patient preparation time, examination time, and scan time. Before the Philips consultants even came to the hospital, they had analyzed three months of objective utilization information and brought this data with them for the Kaizen Event. The Kaizen Event itself was carried out over five intensive days in January 2011 with the close involvement of a large multi-disciplinary in-house team from the Imaging and Functional Diagnostic Centers.

During the week, a five-step cyclic process was used to create a smarter MRI department. The steps included: define, measure, analyze, improve and monitor. The system utilization data and analysis gave the team a solid basis for developing concrete measures. Each morning the Philips team presented their findings from the previous day and discussed strategies for improvement. The proposed ideas were then immediately tried out in the MRI department. The next morning the team gathered again, and started over. Being able to immediately test new ideas is a critical element in the Kaizen process, which gives everyone instant feedback on an idea's feasibility.



Overbooking used to reduce waitlists

Based on the facts that had been presented, the hospital staff knew that gaps would occur in their schedule every day. They just did not know exactly when they would be, or on which scanner. One idea that came up during the brainstorming sessions was to book patients like the airlines do. Book 3 to 4 extra patients each day and inform them that they were on “standby”. Patients were asked to come in the morning or after lunch and bring a good book or other pastime with them. They were then promised that they would be examined sometime during that part of the day.

What did the patients think of this? In general, they were very satisfied. One patient said, “If I had not done this, I would of course have been sitting at home and waiting, so I am grateful for the opportunity.” This reduced the wait for some outpatients by several weeks which reduced their stress as well.

Other improvements included setting higher standards for getting clear instructions from referrals and focusing on the effectiveness of carrying out the most common routine examinations of the head, back, and knees, which accounts for 80 percent of the imaging department’s business.

Reduced stress for staff

Another advantage of the Kaizen Event was that it gave staff a clear and objective view of their actual situation. Andre van Est, Philips Consultant, says, “The hospital was really stressed about their waitlists, but the actual situation was a lot better than they thought. Sometimes you have all this stress around a myth and with the utilization data we could show what was really going on. This helped them reduce the amount of stress that the staff were feeling around their waitlists.”

"Standby"

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Short protocols and smart ways of working

“We spent a lot of time going through and shortening study protocols without compromising the quality of investigations,” says Cecilia Petersen, section chief at the MRI section and Boel Hanson, section leader and radiology nurse. “In addition, we have been working systematically with the new workflow. For example, we filmed in the study rooms to see how we are moving around in the room. Simple things, like placing what we usually use immediately, can save many costly steps, and thus time.”

Another tangible change was to turn on the planning. “In healthcare, we often started with the schedule, and then planned activities accordingly. Nowadays we do the opposite,” says Peter Hochberg. “We look at what production needs we have, what skills are needed to cope with this, and then we put together the schedule based on that.”

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Results achieved

In a few short months, the MRI department at Skåne University Hospital has achieved the following tangible results:

- Several routine tests are now being done in 20 minutes instead of 30 minutes.
- The backlog for all routine examinations for which patients had been waiting a long time have been cleared up. All examinations of the head, back, or knees can now be performed within a reasonable amount of time.
- Improved working conditions for scheduling staff who previously spent too much time handling cancellations.
- Time can now be set aside for research and development - even during the day! In the MRI section, there are no longer any backlogs on pending referrals. Instead they have been able to introduce new types of examinations.

Because of their willingness to think big and their willingness to change and learn, the hospital's goals were met, including their ultimate goal of being able to do what is most beneficial for patients.

“We have recently added an application specialist here and can now begin to offer small bowel examinations in children with MR instead of CT,” says Cecilia Petersen.

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