Author's response to reviews

Title: Quality Management: Reduction of Waiting Time and Efficiency Enhancement in an ENT-University Outpatients' Department

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Professor Graham,

First of all we would like to thank you for so thoroughly reviewing our manuscript. As we learned from the three reviews, it did not become clear enough what were the aim of our study and the intention of our paper. Furthermore, the „Methods“ section was criticised from a stylistic point of view and it was suggested that several sentences belonged more properly to the “Results” part. The reviewers found that “Results” and “Discussion” should be more comprehensive to make the aim of the work and the intention of our publication clearer.

After re-reading our manuscript we agree completely with this point of view. We, therefore, have revised the whole text in-depth. Especially the problem we had to solve was worked out clearly to clarify the study character of our task. The “Methods” section underwent stylistic changes to make our procedure more understandable (analysis of the actual state, error analysis, corrective measures, control of efficiency).

As suggested by the reviewers, we extended our “Results” section in order to make correlation of task and result clearer. Especially the two main improvements (implementation of a patient telephone hotline, more detailed appointments book) are stressed with respect to a better flexibility of our system. The “Discussion”, of course, was modified to match the clearer part of “Methods” and “Results”.

We are convinced to now have described in detail our methodical procedure to pinpoint the problems, the consequently conceived improvements, the integration of these measures into our daily routine, and the examination of their effectiveness. In our opinion this reworked manuscript may be very helpful to colleagues in other clinics confronted with similar problems; especially, as questions of quality management and economics are increasing concerns.

All changes and/or corrections are written in green to make it easier of the reviewers to realize our response to their suggestions.

In the following, we comment in more detail our reaction to the single criticisms.

Reviewer's report 1; Reviewer: Margus Lember

The current paper describes a project of introducing a patient hotline for the ENT outpatients’ department.
Major compulsory revisions:
1. Although the aim of the intervention is described in the paper, the aim of the report is not clearly spelled out. This makes it impossible to understand what has been the research question in this paper. Therefore it is essential to clarify the aim of the paper.

Derived modifications:
In the third and fourth paragraph of the “Background” section the purpose of our work is clearly stated. This leads to the research question of our article.

2. The chapter of Methods is written untraditionally. The used subheadings are not used in a systematic way. The schematic telegram style is often used that is not appropriate for a research paper. Therefore the whole chapter should be rewritten.

Derived modifications:
The „Methods“ section has been re-worked stylistically. We abandoned the “telegram style”, sub-headlines were reduced as much as possible.

3. The results are of course original. However, as there was no clear research question, it is not easy to assess whether the results correspond to the study question and whether all necessary is described here. It is important to keep the results relevant to what was the study question and what is described in Methods. The same can be said on discussion.

Derived modifications:
In „Results“ we describe the five concrete modification measures resulting from the purpose of the study. Furthermore, we describe the control measures to prove the efficiency of our changes resulting directly from the error analysis described in “Methods”. The discussion in this re-read manuscript refers closer than before to the purpose of the study and the results of our reactions.

As an alternative the authors could consider: I think what is reported is important as a piece of information or news on what has been done at this ENT outpatients’ department. This could be published as news or sharing of experience from this department.

Derived modifications:
By clearer structuring the separate sections of our manuscript, we feel that the study character of this intervention comes out in more detail. Thus, this paper goes beyond pure information and may be concrete support for colleagues with similar problems in their own clinic.

Reviewer’s report 2; Reviewer: Gwenaelle Vidal-Trecan

The authors described a study aiming at simplifying the scheduling of and planning patient appointments in the outpatients’ departments and speciality consulting hours of university clinics to ensure efficiency and quality of treatment.
It is an interesting study.
The question posed by the authors well defined. The methods are appropriate. However, a great part of the methods should be moved in the result section (e.g. "Each single phase is described in the following text and summarized in tab. 1"). This analysis is a result of the study as does "These investigations revealed the following problems etc...". The discussion is short.

Derived modifications:
Many thanks for this hint. In this new version of our manuscript we thoroughly re-worked the “Methods” and the “Results” sections. So, a clear differentiation between methods (actual state analysis, analysis of causes, correcting measures, examination of effectiveness) and results (correcting measures, results of the following examination) has been possible. Table 1 has been left unchanged to help the reader by this overview to identify easily the different items of our analysis of current state and analysis of causalities and the resulting consequences.


Derived modifications:
Many thanks for your hint to this paper. Unfortunately it was not yet published when our first version was written. We have added this reference to our discussion.

Major compulsory revision: revise the manuscript so that
- the introduction describe only the background and the aim of the study. For example, the last sentence of the introduction (Its implementation into the daily routine proved very successful) should not be placed there but in the first paragraph of the discussion. It provides an analysis of results before methods and result had been described.

- the method section contains only method and not results
- the results and the discussion section is expanded.

These major revisions needed for a better understanding of the study should be easy to do.

Derived modifications:
As mentioned introductorily and in our answer to reviewer #1 we re-worked plan and subject matter of our manuscript. The introduction describes the background forcing us to become active. From this we developed in-depth the purpose of our study. In correspondence to the requirements of a scientific paper the “Methods” section describes the measures we took to cope with the aim of the study. The “Results” section lists the correcting measures as well as the control of efficiency, whereas the discussion gives the critical recognition.

Reviewer’s report 3
Reviewer: Cordula Wagner

The article describes a small and quit specific improvement project (e.g. introducing a patient hotline to improve the planning of appointments of patients), but no scientific research. The article is maybe of practical interest to care givers.
From a scientific point of view one would expect definitions of key concepts, information about sampling and the measurement instrument. How many people have been asked for the opinion poll, what is the response.

**Derived modifications:**
After thorough re-working of the whole manuscript we feel that the aim of our study has been pointed out more clearly. In the “Methods” section previously missing data concerning our opinion polls (size and contents) have been added. Results of these polls are explained in “Results” and additionally can be seen in tab. 3, 4, and 5. We feel that this new version fulfils the requirements of a scientific paper; furthermore, colleagues with similar problems may profit from a similar procedure.

I would expect that patients and care givers are more satisfied if a very experienced extra person can do the job that have been done before by the care givers themselves. What has happened in the organisation? The authors state that "her capacity is missed somewhere else in the clinic".

**Derived modifications:**
We admit that this phrasing was chosen awkwardly (having been meant personally and not functionally).

Summarizing the whole manuscript has been re-worked with respect to contents, style, and language. We, therefore, are confident that this new manuscript will come up to the requirements of the reviewers; we are looking forward hopefully to your acceptance for publication in BMC Health Services Research.

With our best regards

Matthias Helbig