Introduction

HealthPathways is an integrated care approach that brings together general practice and hospital-based clinicians to develop agreed local management streams and pathways, and document these on an easily accessible website.

HealthPathways provides general practice teams with clinically relevant guidance on the assessment, management, and referral of a range of conditions, which are linked to locally relevant resources.

In 2015, South Western Sydney Local Health District and South Western Sydney PHN jointly partnered in developing HealthPathways South Western Sydney. Program development commenced in January and the site went live July 2015.

Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus (T2DM) was identified as a priority area with diabetes pathways completed and available at launch.

Aim

To evaluate the development, implementation and acceptance of T2DM HealthPathways and assess their alignment with the NSW Health Integrated Care Strategy.

Method

Programmatic evaluation of the T2DM pathways implementation using mixed-methods approach. Qualitative and quantitative data to understand the pathways implications and applications.

This study uses data from:
- HealthPathways working groups
- Online survey responses from General Practitioners (GPs)
- Semi-structured interviews of:
  - Stakeholders (e.g., LHD and PHN staff)
  - GPs who use the T2DM pathways
- Anonymous surveys of patients at diabetes clinics
- HealthPathways web server utilisation data

Interviews are digitally recorded and transcripts analysed using a thematic analysis approach – with initial codes generated directly from the participant’s words. These codes will be abstracted further to identify concepts and categories to generate final themes.

Results

Online Survey (n= 57)

Current results indicate that 63 per cent of GP respondents use HealthPathways, with 37 per cent on a daily to weekly basis and nearly half (47 per cent) use HealthPathways in caring for a patient with DM.

For more details of clinicians experience of HealthPathways, see the graph below.

Stakeholder Interviews (n=12)

Thematic analysis from stakeholder interviews emphasise the importance of established collaborations and the need for standardised tools with common priorities and transparency in processes.

Conclusion

HealthPathways has been live for 18 months and is still under development. Due to early evaluation of the pathways, clinical outcomes data is not in the scope.

Lessons

Early evaluation of the pathways can only provide information on development and project implementation, rather than clinical outcomes.

Implementation Enablers
- Key stakeholders’ commitment
- Seamless networks and collaboration with steering committee and working party rapport
- Clear processes and accountabilities for project management and implementation.

Study Limitations
- Analysis of only one specific pathway has proven to be a barrier for GP recruitment
- Project design dependent on volunteer participation for two arms of the study
- Extent of dynamic engagement
- Access to Diabetes clinics.

Future Research

- Broader scope for evaluation of multiple pathways.
- Further enquiry into the experiences and practical implementation of the HealthPathways within the general practice business model (including referral to specialisation services).
- Cost analysis for impacts on lower duplication of pathology/imaging studies and hospitalisations.
- Potential impact on streamlining patient flow through the health system and decrease on avoidable hospitalisations due to early identification and timely management of targeted conditions.

Evaluation of clinical outcomes and patient experience

This study has collected initial patient surveys from the region’s diabetes clinics with the aim of future research using this as a baseline of patient care. There were 41 surveys collected and the following initial data has been collated.