

Introduction to Process Mapping

Quality improvement literature has emphasized the importance of frontline staff in service delivery improvement initiatives. Ensuring that these staff can influence and manage continuous quality improvement is essential for promoting quality and in improving client outcomes.

Clinical pathways and service processes have evolved over time, often by adding one new task on to another, rather than through conscious decisions to improve them. This can often result in complex patient pathways or workflows that are burdensome for staff to implement. When healthcare staff are asked why something happens, the answer can frequently be “because that’s how it’s always been done” rather than “because this is the best way.”

The aim of pathway and process review is to give a clear and full understanding of the existing state, so problems can be identified and changes can be made to: reduce staff burden; clarify roles and responsibilities; enhance integration of evidence-based care; and improve patient experience and outcomes. One way of doing this is through process mapping. Process mapping aims to clarify the clinical pathway by providing a visual presentation of each step of the process.

Why Process Map?

Process mapping has shown clinical benefit across a variety of specialties, multidisciplinary teams, and healthcare systems.

- Mapping a process is useful as it offers, often for the first time, an objective, visual representation of the patient journey, highlighting the problems and serving as a platform to generate solutions.
- Creates a culture of ownership, responsibility, and accountability for the process being mapped and subsequent improvements
- Promotes employee engagement
- The process map, the end product of process mapping exercise, offers an easy to understand visual depiction of the process that can be easily understood by employees and other stakeholders involved in process

Who Should Be Involved in the Process Mapping Exercise?

Process mapping should be completed by a multidisciplinary team of healthcare professionals and should involve staff who have intimate knowledge of the process to be improved (e.g., front desk clerk, med techs, nurses, physicians, social workers). It should also include staff who have authority to influence change in processes subsequent to completion of the process mapping exercise (e.g., chief medical officers, administrators or directors). Process mapping can also include clients or consumers of care. The addition of client feedback in the mapping process has been shown to improve responsiveness of care systems to client needs.