The aim of this change management project was to develop and implement an Operational Policy for an Acute Medical Assessment Unit (AMAU) in a Model 3 Hospital. It is widely acknowledged policies, procedures and guidelines are aids to improve the quality of healthcare provision by setting out a standardised approach to consistent best practice that is evidence-based.

The last two years has seen significant progress in the implementation of the HSE clinical care programmes and in particular the Acute Medicine Programme. The programme enables the appropriate streaming of acutely unwell adult medical patients away from Emergency Department into an AMAU to improve the clinical care and patient experience.

The HSE Change Model provided a useful framework to develop and implement a new model of care within the hospital which is underpinned by a sound Operational Policy.

The project was successful in achieving its aim. However, the AMAU is an establishing unit and further work is required to mainstream the change making it ‘the way we do our business’ within the culture, processes and structures in the hospital and particularly within the Emergency Department.
Develop and Implement an Operational Policy for an Acute Medical Assessment Unit

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Introduction & Background

The Acute Medicines Programme (AMP)² provides a framework for the delivery of acute medical services in Ireland. The aim of the programme is to improve the patient’s experience by directing the patient to the right care, at the right time, and in the right place.

Patients with acute and emergency medical problems should experience a continuum of high quality medical care that is safe and accessible and this can be delivered in an Acute Medical Assessment Unit (AMAU). Policies ensure care is consistent and based on best practice.³

Aims & Objectives

Aims:

To develop and implement an Operational Policy for an Acute Medical Assessment Unit in a Model 3 Hospital.

Objectives:

- Develop an operational policy for the establishment of an AMAU.
- Establish an inclusion and exclusion criteria for admission to the AMAU.
- Evaluate the operationalisation of the Operational Policy in the establishing AMAU.

Change Process

Stage 1 - Initiation:
- Senior Management Support.
- Prepare to lead the change.
- Identify key stakeholders and resources.
- Conduct a SWOT and Field Force Analysis.

Stage 2 - Planning:
- Build commitment/ develop a vision.
- Determine the detail of the change.
- Develop a communication plan.

Stage 3 - Implementation:
- Maintain communication.
- Support Staff.
- Have clear roles and tasks and responsibilities.
- Respond quickly and decisively to developments which require a change to policy.

Stage 4 - Mainstreaming:
- Stabilise the change.
- Make it the ‘way we do our business’.
- Identify small wins.
- Monitor and evaluate outcomes.
- Make adjustments as required to ensure sustainability.
- Maintain communication.
- Data Collection and Analysis

Evaluation

Evaluation Methods Used:

- Focus Group.
- Data Collection: 11.6% of all medical patients who presented in ED (0800-1600, Mon to Fri) in April were seen in AMAU. All patients were reviewed within 1 hour by a Consultant and a decision to admit or discharge was made within 6 hours of registration.

- Staff Questionnaire: Question 6.

Organisational Impact

The introduction of an AMAU supported by an Operational Policy will help to reduce the numbers of inappropriate admissions, improve patient outcomes, reduce Emergency Department overcrowding, and improve hospital efficiencies.²

Conclusion

An AMAU exists to provide specialist assessment and care for patients with all but the most critically unstable of medical problems when emergency management is indicated.

References

1. HSE, 2008. Improving our services; A user's guide to managing change in the HSE.