NOVEL MAPPING OF HEALTHCARE REFERRAL PROCESSES IN THE SINGAPORE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

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Background
"Beyond hospital to community" by MOH indicates a shift of focus towards step-down care. This cross-sectional study was conducted to map out the Singaporean healthcare referral processes between General Practitioners (GPs), Community Care Providers (CCPs), and hospitals.

Methods
This is a prospective study of 24 GPs(n = 12) and Community Care Partners(n = 12) through individual qualitative interviews. Using an ethnographic approach, iterative content analysis was carried out. A consolidated referral processes workflow was distilled. Challenges were also identified through truncated thematic analysis.

Results
Data saturation was achieved for both GPs and CCPs. 6 flowcharts depicting the healthcare referral processes between GPs and Hospital, GPs and CCTs, CCTs and Hospital were distilled. Pathways are categorized according to type of institution referring (shown in figure 1, Hospital to GPs), subsidy status of patients and type of conditions. Red boxes indicate specific challenges brought up in the corresponding stage of the referral pathway. Results showed that referral processes are often complicated and inefficient, and care information is not shared adequately for optimal care.
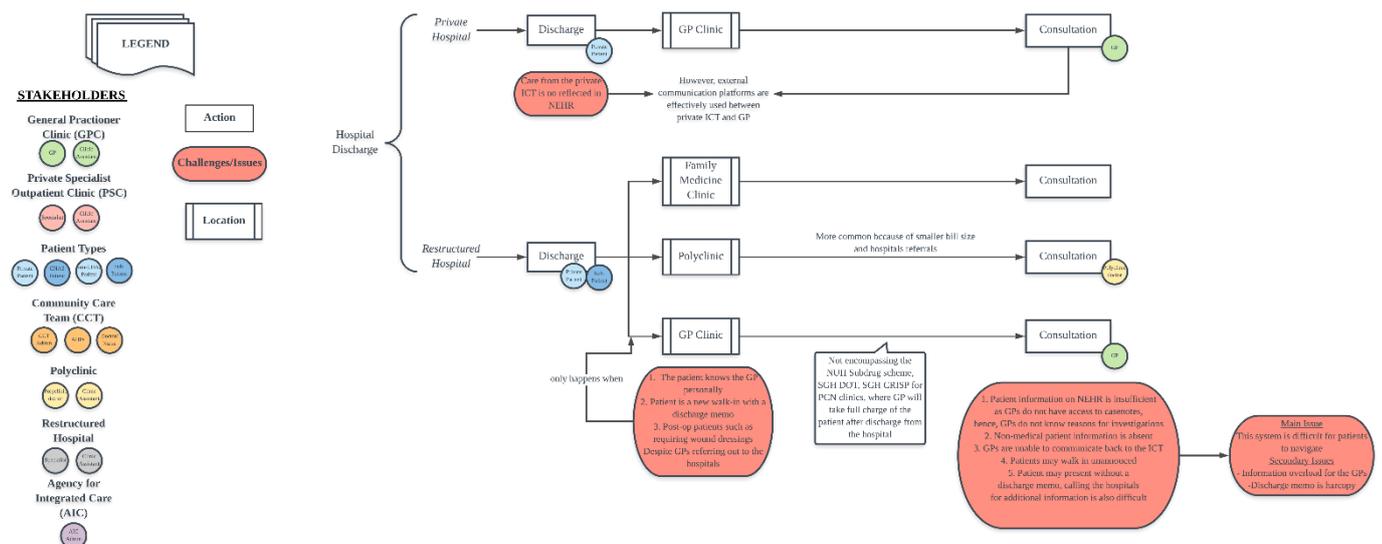

Figure 1, Hospital to GPs

Notable thematic challenges include GPs finding pathways unnecessarily complicated, bureaucratic, and limited by the insurance policy of patients (n=4). In addition, prompt referral updates are absent for GPs (n=11).

Conclusion

This study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the local healthcare referral system, through mapping out healthcare referral processes between healthcare providers. This could pave the way to revolutionary solutions to improve primary care. Recommendations made by providers are also discussed.

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