Background/context
Rehabilitation Services within the National Waiting Times Centre Board (NWTCB) includes Physiotherapists, Occupational Therapists and Rehabilitation Assistants working across orthopaedic and cardiothoracic specialties. As an essential healthcare service, there is currently a national drive towards increasing patient access to therapies, particularly at weekends.

In response to this, a proposal to implement a seven day rehabilitation service involving a redesign of the physiotherapy and occupational therapy workforce was approved and introduced in January 2014.

Prior to this, the orthopaedic service consisted of:
- Physiotherapists working a prioritised service Saturday and Sunday which typically was not a full day
- Occupational Therapists working a prioritised Saturday only service

The cardiothoracic service consisted of:
- The physiotherapy team providing an emergency respiratory service only at weekends, with no resource to progress patients following surgery

This prioritised service was covered by an on-call and overtime system using a limited number of substantive and bank staff
which resulted in a fragmented patient journey with restricted access to treatment at weekends.

### Problem
Availability of rehabilitation services varied according to day of the week and hour of the day. Since weekend services were delivered on an emergency or prioritised basis, only a limited number of patients could access rehabilitation services and as a consequence cardiothoracic patients were unable to progress. Similarly orthopaedic patients undergoing surgery midweek were unable to progress unless they had been prioritised for discharge. This varied level of service delivery across seven days resulted in delayed discharges, bottlenecks and an inconsistent patient experience.

### Aim
To improve quality and access to physiotherapy and occupational therapy services across seven days, regardless of day of surgery. This will:
- Improve patient journeys
- Focus on patient centred care
- Improve flow
- Distribute caseload evenly over seven days
- Facilitate earliest possible discharge
- Address staff concerns regarding inequitable service

### Action taken
The strategy for change included:
- Redesigning the workforce
- Submission of a bid to secure funding for additional resources
- Identifying optimal service levels

Methodology, tools and techniques used included:
Carrying out a stakeholder analysis
- Engaging with staff side representatives and Human Resource Advisor at the earliest opportunity
- Engagement with staff which included one to one meetings
- Developing metrics to evaluate the change
- Reviewing patient flow and activity levels using data collated and applying existing workforce tools to determine skill mix and additional staff required

Additional staff were required to:
- Resource the increased level of service
- Cover weekend staff taking days off in the following week
- Progress rehabilitation programmes across seven days
- Maintain quality service and safe skill mix

**Results**

**Patient Benefits:**
- Consistent quality of rehabilitation service
- Consistent patient experience
- Person-centred services maintained across seven days
- Increased opportunities to communicate with carers and relatives
- Potential for earlier discharge home

**Staff benefits:**
- All staff were in agreement that a seven day service would benefit patients
- Improving the flow reduced the pressure on clinical staff
to act as gatekeepers to a restricted service

- The weekend service reduced the backlog of patients waiting to be discharged at the beginning of the week

Organisational Benefits:

- As a result of improving patient flow, the length of the rehabilitation programme is no longer affected by day of surgery
- Targeted rehabilitation in the acute sector supports an emphasis on self-management at home
- More effective utilisation of beds and resources by ensuring timely discharge

Efficiency savings and productive gains

- Previously staff worked additional weekend hours and attracted an overtime payment for weekend working. With the introduction of the seven day service, staff now receive an unsocial payment and only work 37.5 hours
- There have been productivity gains with data showing an increased number of patients being treated and discharged by therapy services at the weekend since the introduction of this service as indicated in Tables 1 and 2.
Table 1 Comparison of weekend activity before (Oct 13) and after 7 day working

Number of patients seen at the weekend

Table 2 Comparison of weekend discharges before (Oct 13) and after 7 day working

Number of weekend discharges

Percentage

Month

OT ortho
PT ortho
• Improved patient flow and productivity resulting from the consistent therapy discharges being achieved across the seven days

Table 3 Comparison of orthopaedic therapy discharges by day of week before (Oct 13) and after 7 day working (Apr 14).

- New shift pattern facilitates staff availability during periods of high clinical demand (Wed-Fri)

**Sustainability**

The main things necessary to sustain this service are firstly having the correct skill mix and number of staff available to adequately resource the service. Secondly, building in sufficient funding resources to meet capacity and capability and thirdly ensuring that all staff are coping with the new shift patterns.

Therefore:

- A timely recruitment process is required to replace staff
- Rotas should be reviewed and changed where possible to accommodate clinical and staff needs
- Regular meetings need to continue with different staff groups to troubleshoot any new challenges as they
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Lessons learned</th>
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<td>• Staffing resources per day and rotas need to be reviewed as service is evaluated</td>
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<td>• Ensure staff have access to equal levels of support throughout the process</td>
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<td>• Identify early adopters and get them on board to champion the change</td>
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<td>• Follow through on challenges identified during one to ones, particularly those matters related to finance or work life balance and ensure the impact the change will have on individuals is clear</td>
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