Coaching for Sustainable Improvement

Improving patient enquiry response times through PDSA coaching, after COVID-19 exposed a process that had never been designed

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SMART AIM Reduce average patient enquiry response time by at least 25 percent within six months, while improving patient satisfaction and reducing formal complaints.

107 min	72 min	57 min
baseline	PDSA 3 (30% faster)	month 6 (47% lower)

D The situation

The digital enquiry process had grown over the years without ever being designed. COVID-19 brought a surge in demand and remote working, and the cracks became impossible to ignore.

I was consulted as **Improvement Project Lead**, reporting to the Director of Change Management, to walk the solution with the team rather than hand one over.

M Baseline

Issue	Impact
Average response 107 min, highly variable	Target was under 75 min
Email and phone routes that did not link up	Confusion and duplicate requests
Manual logging by whichever team picked it up	No real time visibility
No owner, no SLA, no escalation route	Missed enquiries sat unresolved
Complaints at their highest recorded level	Patient dissatisfaction

I Three PDSA cycles

Cycle	What we did	What we learned
1	Mapped the process with stakeholders and designed a single route workflow with an ownership model	Duplication and unclear ownership in every team
2	Launched one digital form, named owners, 24 hour triage SLA, automatic escalation	Week on week improvement; team refined thresholds in week 3
3	Version controlled SOPs, staff trained before go live, live Power BI dashboard	Under 75 min confirmed

How I coached: questions before answers

1 Map together
Frontline and operational staff drew the real process, pain points and all.

2 Root cause together
Fishbone for breadth, then 5 Whys for depth.

3 Test small
Three PDSA cycles, each small enough to learn from fast.

4 Hand it over
The team now runs, governs and maintains it.

Discovery: I walk alongside them — Testing: we build it together — Sustain: they own it

A Root cause analysis

Fishbone: five areas

People: different ways of working, unclear ownership

Technology: manual tracking, limited visibility

Governance: no accountability, no SOP, no escalation

Process: multiple channels, duplicate requests

Communication: poor visibility of status

5 Whys

Why 1 Requests were slow and unresolved: there was no standard process.

Why 2 Every team worked differently, with no agreed approach.

Why 3 Ownership and escalation had never been formally defined.

Why 4 The process had grown without ever being designed.

Root cause: no standard digital pathway with clear ownership, escalation and visibility of performance.

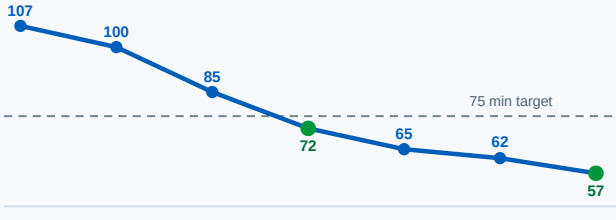
Measurement framework

- **Process:** average response time; percentage resolved within target.
- **Outcome:** complaints; positive feedback; stakeholder alignment.
- **Balancing:** staff workload and satisfaction, so the fix did not just move pressure onto staff.

Timeline

Weeks 1 to 2	Weeks 3 to 4	Weeks 5 to 6	Weeks 7 to 8	Week 9 on
Discovery	Root cause	PDSA testing	Evaluation	Sustain

Run chart: average response time (minutes)



Seven points in a row moving in one direction: a real trend, not normal variation. The fall continued after the project closed, because the team owned it.

Results

Measure	Baseline	Result
Average response time	107 min	**72 min at PDSA 3 (30% faster), 57 min by month 6 (47% lower)**
Formal complaints	Peak level	**20% lower**
Positive feedback	Baseline	**15% higher**
Stakeholder alignment	Not measured	**98%** (new measure)

C Sustainability and learning

- SOPs version controlled; staff trained before go live; weekly Power BI review; governance review cycle; escalation volumes stayed stable.
- **Do differently:** involve patients from day one of scoping; put the dashboard in at baseline; review feedback more often.

Why this matters here

Compassion
Start by listening to patients and staff.

Accountability
Measure openly; the team owns results.

Respect
Work alongside teams and their pressures.

Excellence
Build capability that lasts.

"The best improvement I have led is the one the team carried on without me."

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Methods: Model for Improvement, PDSA, Lean Six Sigma (DMAIC), A3, run charts