

Aspiring to Excellence in the Surgical Treatment of Lung Cancer Improving the Surgical Pathway

Cancer is always an emotive subject, arguably none more so than lung cancer. Overall 5-year survival is extremely poor, around 5%, usually because the disease presents late, and only a small number of all the patients diagnosed with lung cancer will be suitable for potentially curative surgery.



Yorkshire Cancer Network

Cancer targets aim to start definitive treatment within 62 days of initial presentation. Once the patient has been accepted for surgery, their operation must take place within 31 days, keeping within the 62-day pathway.

For many reasons, we may fail to deliver this timely service. Consequently, we are constantly striving to improve this pathway for our patients, starting with the initial diagnostic work-up, and, in our case, culminate in radical surgery.

The Yorkshire Cancer Network is investing considerable time and resources in looking at ways we can improve on the current state. With the expertise of The Lean Healthcare Academy, a week in April was devoted to scrutinising the Thoracic Surgical pathway, beginning with mapping the current state, progressing to developing and validating an ideal, and importantly achievable, future state.

As the week progressed, with many highs and lows along the way, all the gaps that needed filling in order to achieve our surgical Nirvana were identified. This was an incredibly useful exercise, and we managed, on paper at least, in reducing our pathway from one that took a mammoth 74 steps, down to 47 steps over a drastically shorter time period. For the grand finale, this ideal future pathway was formally presented to the PCTs and local managers, with emphasis made on the benefits to the patients by delivering a quality and time-efficient service, and also to the Trust by achieving national targets and becoming much more cost-efficient. We were able to identify ways that we can improve on the current situation at no or low cost, although some financial input will be necessary in the short- to medium-term, in order to reach our goal - a price worth paying.

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