
Online preoperative screening solutions

Key points:

A standardised online preoperative screening system will benefit both patients and clinicians: reducing time and costs for patients as well as allowing clinicians to prioritise their time, and increasing the overall quality of care.

A study by Sheffield Teaching Hospitals has estimated saving for the Trust of £0.64M annually, based on 40,000 anaesthetics per year.

Online preoperative screening does not replace current processes; it is seen as an enhancement to preoperative assessment allowing clinicians to make better use of their time by targeting patients that need additional care.

Online preoperative screening seeks to reduce the burden on patients and providers enhancing the patient experience and quality of care.

What is preoperative screening?

Anaesthetic preoperative assessment is a vital element in ensuring safe surgery and anaesthesia. Online preoperative screening seeks to reduce the burden on patients and providers by:

- preventing fit and well patients from having to travel to attend the hospital;
- allowing resources to be focused more efficiently on patients who need to attend;
- reducing delays, costs and cancellations; and
- enhancing the 'patient experience', quality of care, and efficiency of the service for all.

It is recommended that trusts examine the benefits of implementing a preoperative screening tool as part of the preoperative assessment process. Typically this would include:

- A computerised pre-assessment questionnaire which is completed by patients where it is most convenient for them (e.g. at home, surgical clinic, GP surgery, or pre-op assessment clinic).
- A screening tool that provides the anaesthetic team and care-givers an accurate view of the level of risk for each patient, enabling a bespoke pre-operative care or treatment plan to be set out.

Why is this important?

A standardised online pre-assessment screening system will benefit both patients and clinicians: reducing time and costs for patients as well as allowing clinicians to prioritise their time, increasing the overall quality of care.

This approach would reduce the number of visits required by fit and healthy patients (e.g. ASA 1) to preoperative clinic, avoiding unnecessary journeys, work-days missed and expenses associated with travel.

Improved patient care and efficiency for clinical staff would be realised through:

- early triage of patients due to attend clinic (e.g. identification of ASA grade 1 patients);
- improved audit and clinical governance for peri-operative care;
- standardisation in the pre-assessment process; and
- ability to prioritise time for face-to-face assessment.

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Who is already using the techniques?

Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

One example is the work being carried out in Sheffield Teaching Hospitals with the ePAQ (electronic Personal Assessment Questionnaire). This application provides:

- A secure hosted N3-based system for clinicians to initiate and view pre-assessment questionnaires
- An online interface for patients to complete pre-assessment questionnaires (without disclosing patient identifiable data)
- A simple to use, interactive and meaningful form-filling experience where patients are only asked relevant questions A standardised pre-assessment question set

Phased clinical roll out in Sheffield and other interested trusts began in April 2012.

Key questions

Q: What level of benefit can I expect from online preoperative screening?

A: A standardised online pre-assessment screening system will benefit both patients and clinicians, reducing time and societal costs as well as allowing clinicians to prioritise their time, increasing the overall quality of care.

- Reduced clinic attendance, patient journeys, work-days missed
- Improved efficiency, audit and clinical governance
- Ability to prioritise time for face-to-face assessment

A study by Sheffield Teaching Hospitals has estimated that based on 40,000 anaesthetics per year, 16,000 fewer appointments would be required saving the Trust an estimated £0.64M annually.

Q: How does this affect resourcing?

A: Screening is intended to support good quality pre operative assessment and good quality medical care, not to replace current processes. It is seen as an enhancement to preoperative assessment which would allow clinicians to make better use of their time by targeting patients that need additional care.

Q: Where does preoperative screening fit in the patient pathway?

A: It is envisaged that preoperative screening would occur either in clinic via a kiosk or online at the patient's leisure. There is increased benefit to preoperative screening beginning early in the process for example with the GP when a referral is made although it is more likely that an invitation to complete online preoperative screening would be part of the patient appointment letter and confidentially.

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