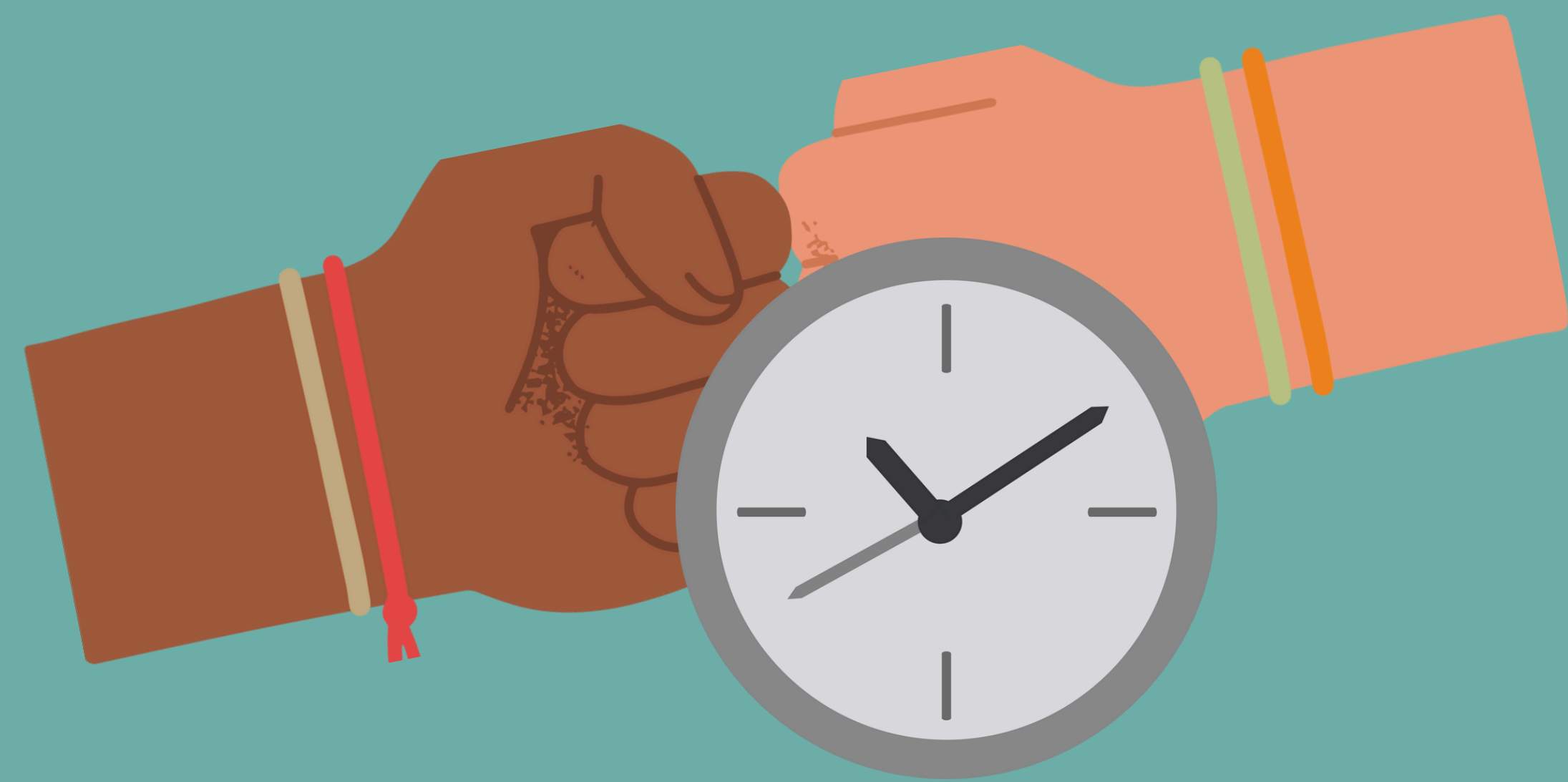


# KNUCKLING DOWN ON HAND THERAPY WAIT TIMES

## A QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

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### INTRODUCTION

- The British Association of Hand Therapy Trauma standards have recommended that most hand injuries are seen within 7 days of initial presentation.<sup>1</sup> Delay in treatment is associated with increased levels of disability for some hand conditions and the need for more hand therapy sessions.<sup>2</sup>
- At King's College Hospital, an internal audit in 2023 looked at 193 urgent hand therapy patients referrals across 3 months. This showed we were breaching this target for 95% of patients.
- We focused on the referrals from the Virtual Fracture Clinic (VFC) as we receive 51% of our urgent referrals from this clinic. These particular patients were taking a median number of 36.5 days to be seen for their initial appointment.

### OBJECTIVES

The hand therapy team aimed to:

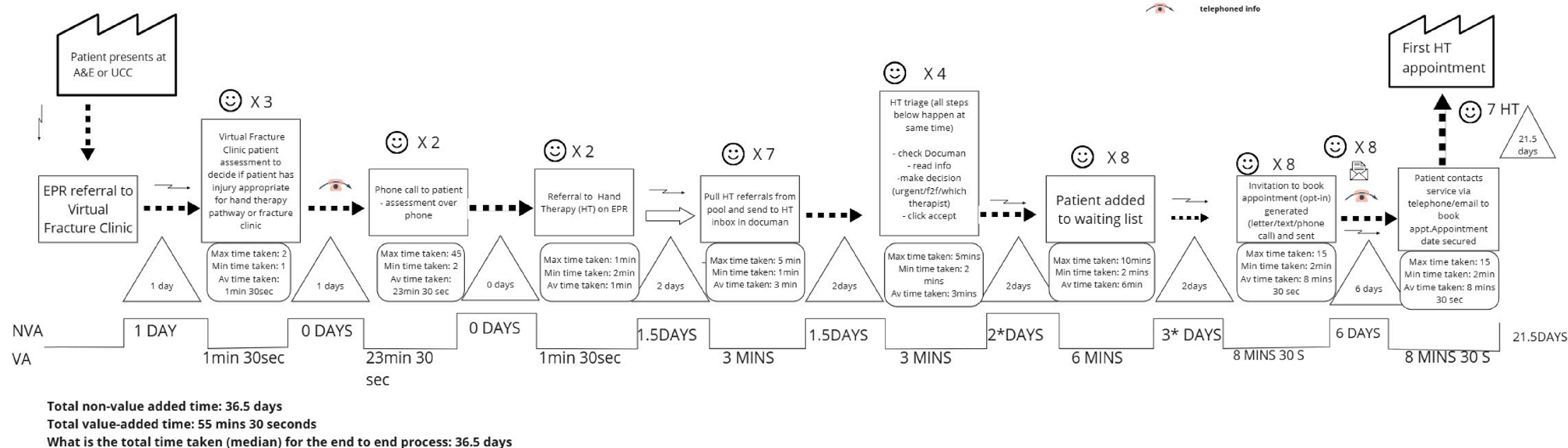
- Increase the number of VFC patients that are seen within 7 days from 5% to 50%.
- Decrease the number of VFC patients that are seen after 14 days from 78% to 10%.
- Reduce the median length of their VFC pathway from 36.5 days to 10 days.

### GETTING TO GRIPS WITH THE PROBLEM

- A value stream map (VSM) was built (see below image) to examine the patient's journey and to see where delays exist in the patient pathway.
- The VSM shows each part of the process and the time taken (split into value-adding time and non-value adding time).
- Data collection: The patients were identified through our hand therapy referral log and then the author recorded the dates that each step was completed. This information was taken from our various IT systems e.g. our referral system and our appointment booking system. 101 patient journeys were examined retrospectively over a 3 months period.
- The median number is represented in this VSM.
- This highly visual tool was used to communicate the importance of this work to stakeholders.

### Value Stream Map

#### Virtual Fracture Clinic Pathway and Hand Therapy - April, May, June 2023

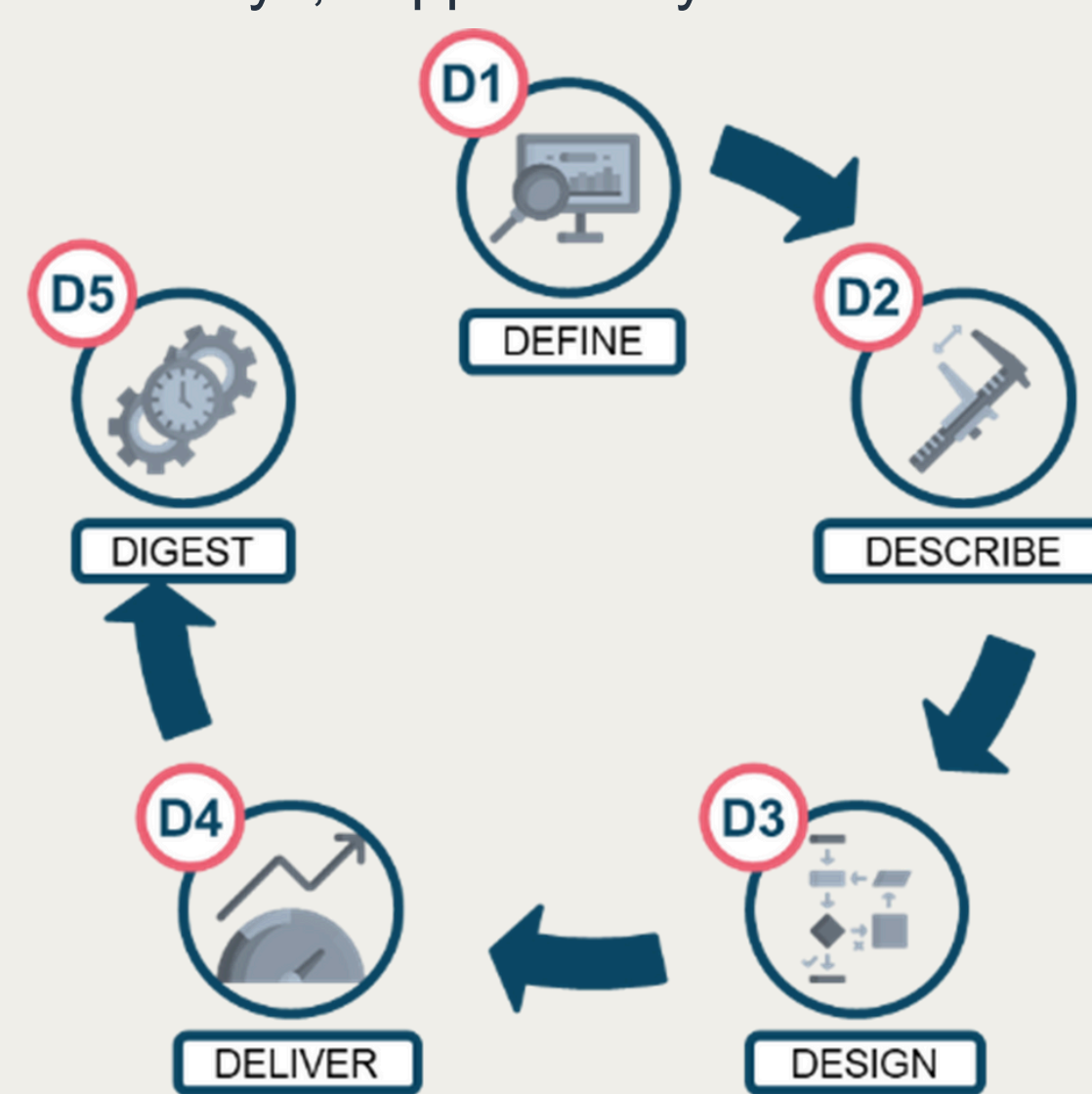


### ISSUES THE VSM HIGHLIGHTED

- After referrals were triaged, it was taking a further 35 days for these patients' first hand therapy appointment.
- As hand therapy is an opt-in service, the median time it took for the patient to book an appointment was 6 days after being sent an invitation text or letter. Our therapy administration team is centralised and support 12 outpatient therapy services in our Trust.
- Once patients made contact, it was another 21.5 days before their first hand therapy appointment - either due to our service's appointment availability or patient choice.
- The process of completing this VSM led to an in-depth understanding of the steps required from each member of the multidisciplinary team. There was a new appreciation for the amount of non-value adding steps required to process the referral.

### QUALITY IMPROVEMENT TOOLS

- After defining and describing the problem, we could begin designing a solution using 5D quality improvement methodology (see below). This methodology and its image are used by our local Quality Improvement Team.
- Brainstorming sessions with stakeholders helped identify root causes for delays, supported by fishbone charts.



### HANDLING THE PROBLEM

Three main changes were implemented at different stages

#### Hand Therapy Capacity

- We made the following changes to our hand therapy templates;
  - We decreased our 'new to follow up' ratios from 1:3 to 1:2.3.
  - We reduced non clinical time to increase our clinical capacity.
  - We identified other efficiencies in our timetables.

#### Informing patients of the importance of early Hand Therapy

During their telephone consultations, the VFC team started verbally communicating how improved outcomes can be achieved through early hand therapy. This was reiterated in all VFC patient leaflets.

#### Opt-out rather than opt-in

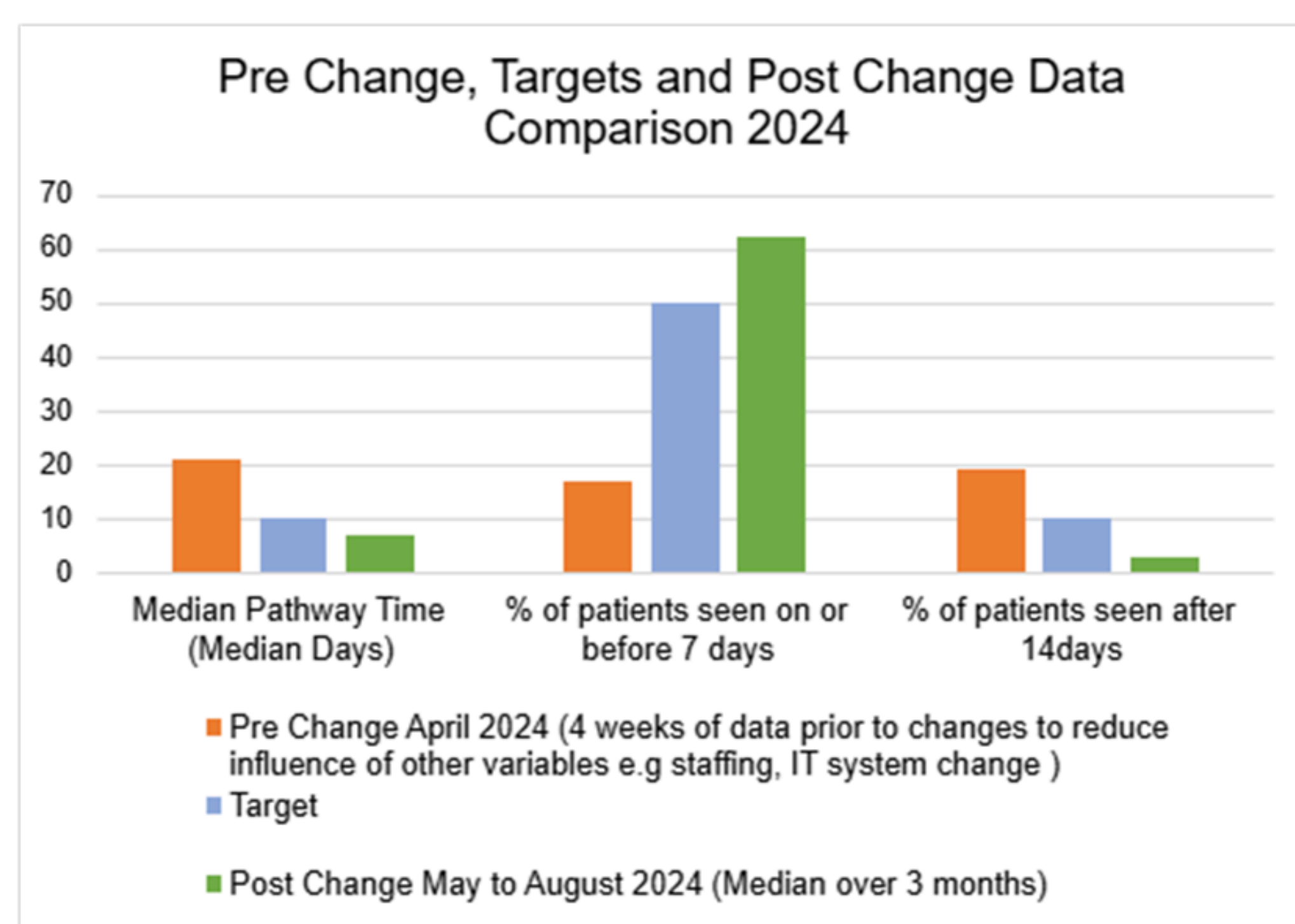
Rather than waiting for patients to opt-in to our service, our therapy admin team called all VFC patients to book them into available slots on the day the referrals were triaged. The admin team were empowered to encourage patients to take the first available appointment.

### RESULTS - BIG THUMBS UP!

- After implementing these changes, we collected data over another three month period from May to August 2024 for 159 patients.
- The data showed that the median number of days from the beginning to end of the process reduced from **36.5 days to 7 days** (see adjacent chart for further details).
- The opt-out rates reduced from 30% to 8% for these patients.
- Our DNA rates remained static at 8% for new patient appointments throughout.

### CONCLUSION

- The VSM is an invaluable tool to identify non-value adding tasks in a pathway and to clearly communicate this to stakeholders to encourage change.
- Change can be challenging in a busy NHS environment, but using visual tools and a quality improvement approach has proven successful in this case.



### REFERENCES

- British Association of Hand Therapists. Standards of hand therapy practice in the rehabilitation of surgically and non surgically managed closed fractures of the hand. Standard Number 9. www.hand-therapy.co.uk. 2023
- Christodoulou N, Asimakopoulos D, Kapetanios K, Seah M, Khan W. Principles of management of hand fractures. J Perioper Pract [Internet]. 2023;33(11):342-9. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/17504589221119739>

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