

Training clinical pharmacy technicians to build competence and expand capacity for coverage of the patient helpline.



Background

In November 2020, the University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust patient helpline was extended to incorporate Queen Elizabeth Hospital – a 1215 bed tertiary care centre. This, along with heightened pharmacy presence in primary care, resulted in a substantial increase in workload within the Medicines Information (MI) department - reflected in Table 1.

Year	Helpline Queries (total)	Helpline Queries (monthly average)
2019/20	481	40
2020/21	1224	102
2021/22	2706	226
2022/23	2872	239
2023/24	3439	287

Table 1: Helpline queries over the last 5 years

This data reflects a continued upward trend in demand for medicines advice services, particularly via the patient helpline. Despite this, no additional staff were allocated to MI. To address this resource bottleneck, we explored cooperative strategies within the wider pharmacy team. Clinical Pharmacy Technicians (CPTs) were identified as a suitable staff group with some capacity.

Aim

Train non-MI CPTs to increase staff expertise and build capacity for patient helpline coverage.

What we did

1. Collaborate with pharmacy governance team to develop standard operating procedures
2. Create a workbook to signpost to relevant Medicines Learning Portal topics and guidance - UKMi and in-house (see Figure 1)
3. Incorporate allocated time for helpline shadowing and supervised practice
4. Assessment - utilise training logs to sign-off a CPTs competence

Future considerations include ongoing professional development to sustain high-quality service delivery, e.g. peer review, re-assessment.

Challenges we encountered

Movement of staff due to lack of capacity in other areas of pharmacy and current lack of capacity within CPT team.

We have been forced to adapt to the constant shift in capacity to allow for training to be completed whilst considering the wider pharmacy team.

Barriers such as clinical expertise on the helpline.

This has been overcome by cooperation with our pharmacy governance team through implementation of SOPs to ensure appropriate supervision, hence safe processes.

What we achieved

- ✓ A training structure is now in place to train non-MI CPTs to work on the patient helpline.
- ✓ Staff that would not ordinarily practice skills unique to working on the patient helpline have had the opportunity to develop their competencies – e.g. expansion of clinical knowledge and counselling skills.
- ✓ We have improved capacity for helpline coverage through shared responsibilities.

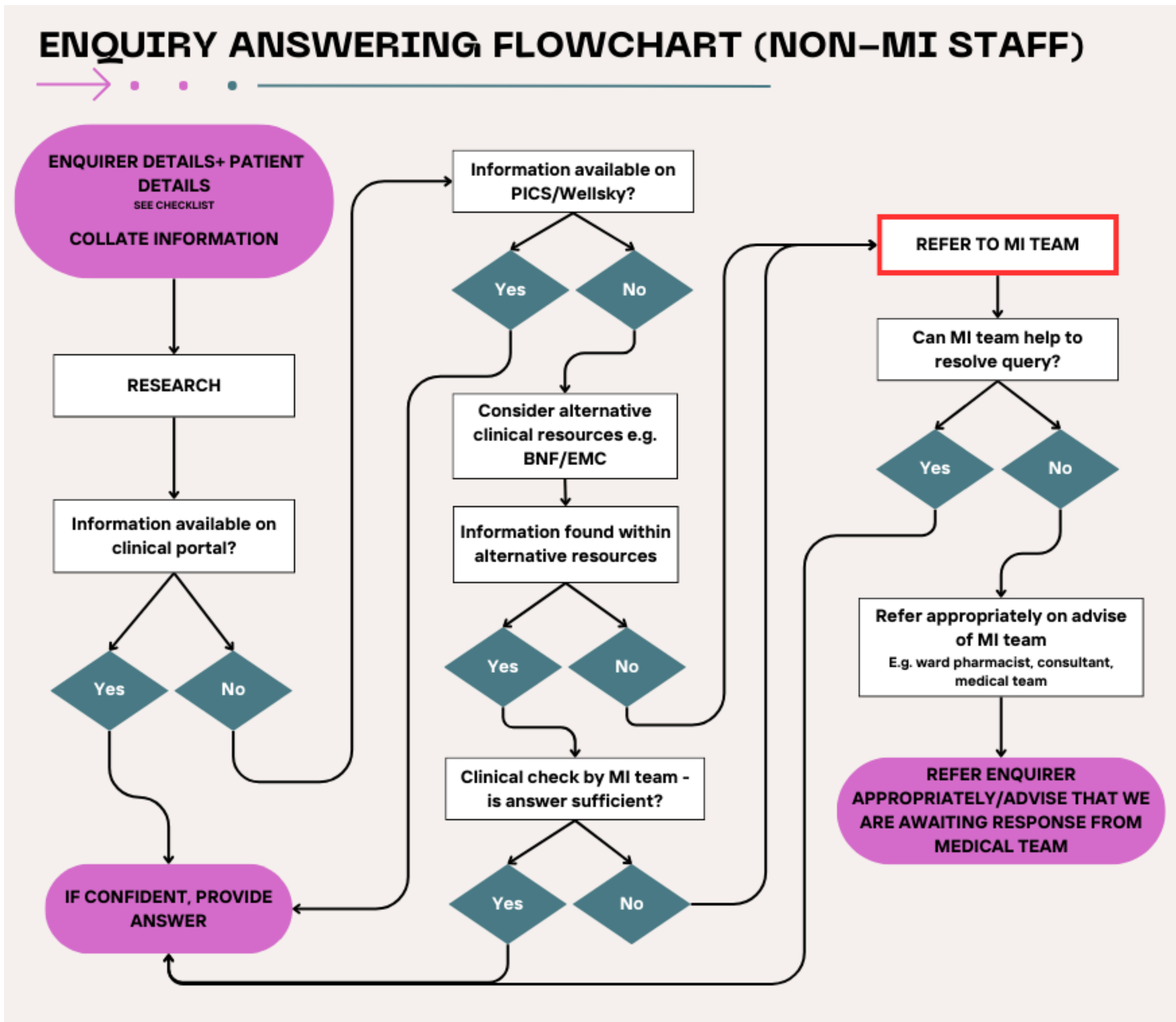




Figure 1: Example of in-house material developed to ensure appropriate supervision and referral

Training Non-Medicines Information Staff for Effective Patient Helpline Support

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