

# Better Updates, Better Care: Improving the communication with relatives in older surgical patients

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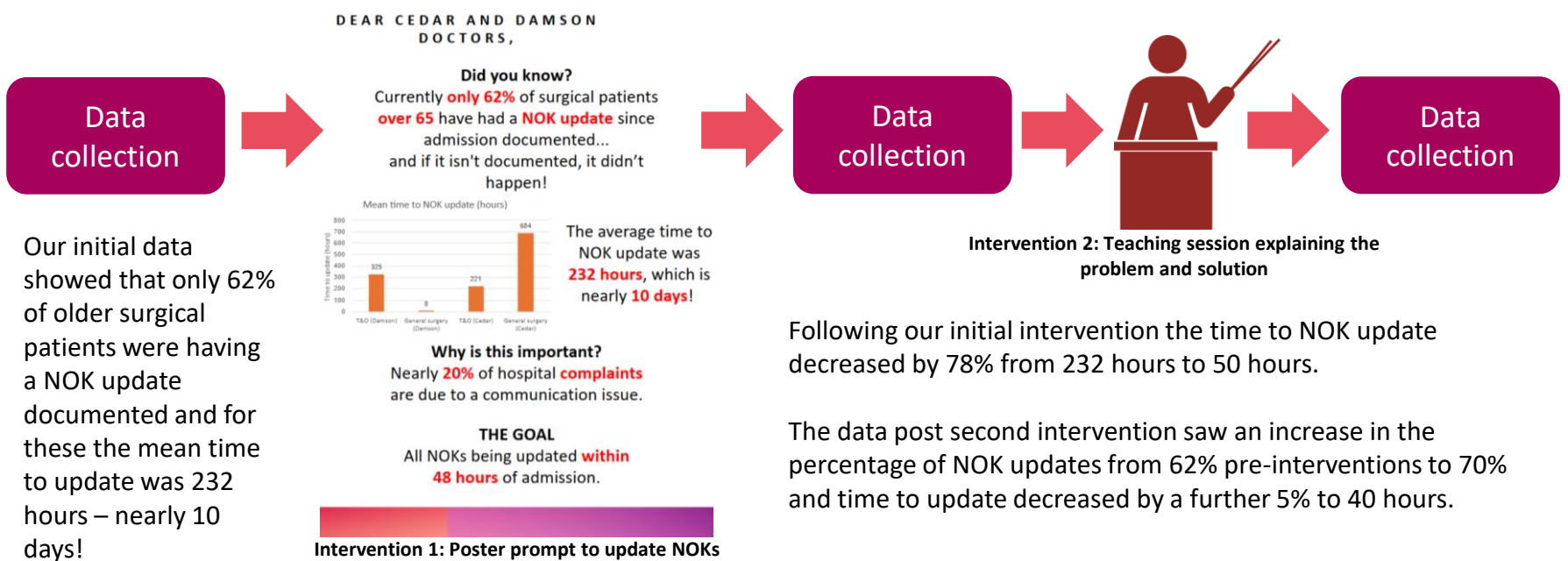
## Background & Aims

According to the GMC's Good Medical Practice, medical professionals have a responsibility to be considerate and compassionate to those close to a patient through giving support and information. For those lacking capacity, clinicians can assume that patients would want those close to them to be kept up to date with their condition<sup>[1]</sup>. NHS digital data last year showed that 17.1% of written complaints are linked with communication<sup>[2]</sup>. The primary aim of this project was to increase the percentage of surgical patients aged 65 or over receiving a next of kin (NOK) update. The secondary aim was to decrease the time to NOK update for this patient group to under 48 hours.

## Methods

QI methodology and 2 PDSA cycle loops were used. Using the electronic patient record surgical patients aged 65 years or over on two surgical wards were identified. Medical records were checked for documentation of a NOK update. Where a NOK update was documented, time to update from surgical team decision to admit was noted. In those without a documented NOK update, time from clerking was recorded. The percentage of patients receiving an update and mean time to update was calculated. Following the implementation of posters prompting NOK updates, data was recollected. Following a teaching session a third data analysis was undertaken.

## Results

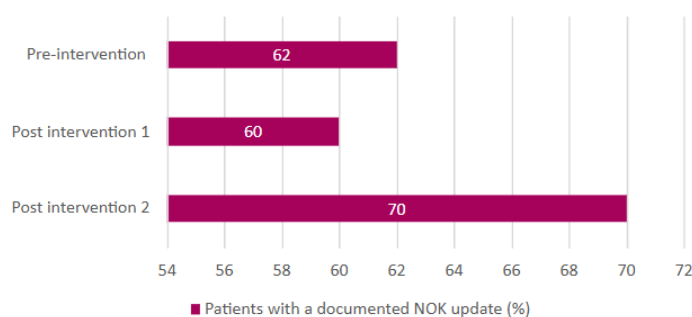


Our initial data showed that only 62% of older surgical patients were having a NOK update documented and for these the mean time to update was 232 hours – nearly 10 days!

Following our initial intervention the time to NOK update decreased by 78% from 232 hours to 50 hours.

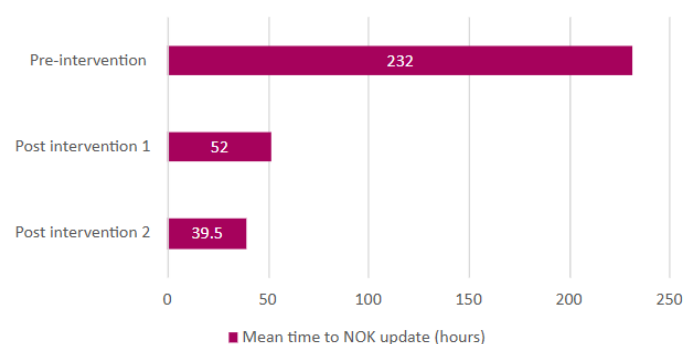
The data post second intervention saw an increase in the percentage of NOK updates from 62% pre-interventions to 70% and time to update decreased by a further 5% to 40 hours.

Percentage of older surgical patients with a documented NOK update for each cycle



Graph 1 showing the percentages of patients with a NOK update for each cycle

Mean time to NOK update for each cycle



Graph 2 showing the mean time to NOK update in hours for each cycle

## Conclusions & Future Developments

Implementation of a poster prompt and undertaking a teaching session, highlighting the importance of communication with NOKs, demonstrated improvement in percentage and mean time to NOK updates for our patient cohort on surgical wards. In the future we wish to improve the content of these discussions and this is the current projection of the project with NOK updates being shaped to ensure information such as baseline cognition and mobility and a clinical frailty score is ascertained as well as starting, if not already in place, ACP discussions to help establish relatives' expectations.

## References

[1] Good medical practice - professional standards - GMC. Available at: <https://www.gmc-uk.org/professional-standards/the-professional-standards/good-medical-practice> (Accessed: 24 February 2025).  
 [2] Data on written complaints in the NHS, 2023-24. Available at: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/data-on-written-complaints-in-the-nhs/2023-24> (Accessed: 24 February 2025).