

ENHANCING PATIENT ACCESS TO OUTPATIENT MUSCULOSKELETAL PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES THROUGH CAPACITY EXPANSION AND SERVICE OPTIMIZATION

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Background

Outpatient musculoskeletal (MSK) physiotherapy services play a critical role in supporting recovery and functional rehabilitation for patients following orthopaedic surgeries and related conditions. While feedback from Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeons suggested that the majority of patients received timely care, a recurring concern was that a subset of patients experienced delays in accessing physiotherapy services. These delays were associated with suboptimal recovery outcomes and decreased patient satisfaction. Hence, this improvement project was initiated to address these concerns and improve service delivery.

Objectives

This improvement project was designed to address the identified service gaps by:

- Increasing appointment availability to meet the growing demand for outpatient MSK physiotherapy services.
- Enhancing operational processes to ensure timely, coordinated, and effective patient management.

Methodology

A comprehensive review conducted in January 2024 identified that, although the existing infrastructure (facilities & equipment) was sufficient, the availability of outpatient musculoskeletal (MSK) physiotherapy appointments was inadequate to meet the increasing demand. In response to these findings, an improvement project was initiated in March 2024, structured around two primary interventions.

First intervention

Expanding workforce capacity by recruiting additional physiotherapists to increase the number of available appointment slots.

Second intervention

Introducing a series of operational enhancements aimed at improving service efficiency and care coordination. These included:

- Decreasing the referral-to-appointment waiting time
- Reducing the incidence of missed post-discharge referrals
- Implementing active monitoring of referrals from Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeons to support timely and well-coordinated patient care

To further strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration, Continuing Medical Education (CME) sessions led by Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeons were introduced for physiotherapists. These sessions include lecturing and demonstration, were designed to enhance communication, promote teamwork, and ensure that physiotherapy care delivery remained aligned with consultants' clinical expectations.

CME by Dr. Lau Choon Ping



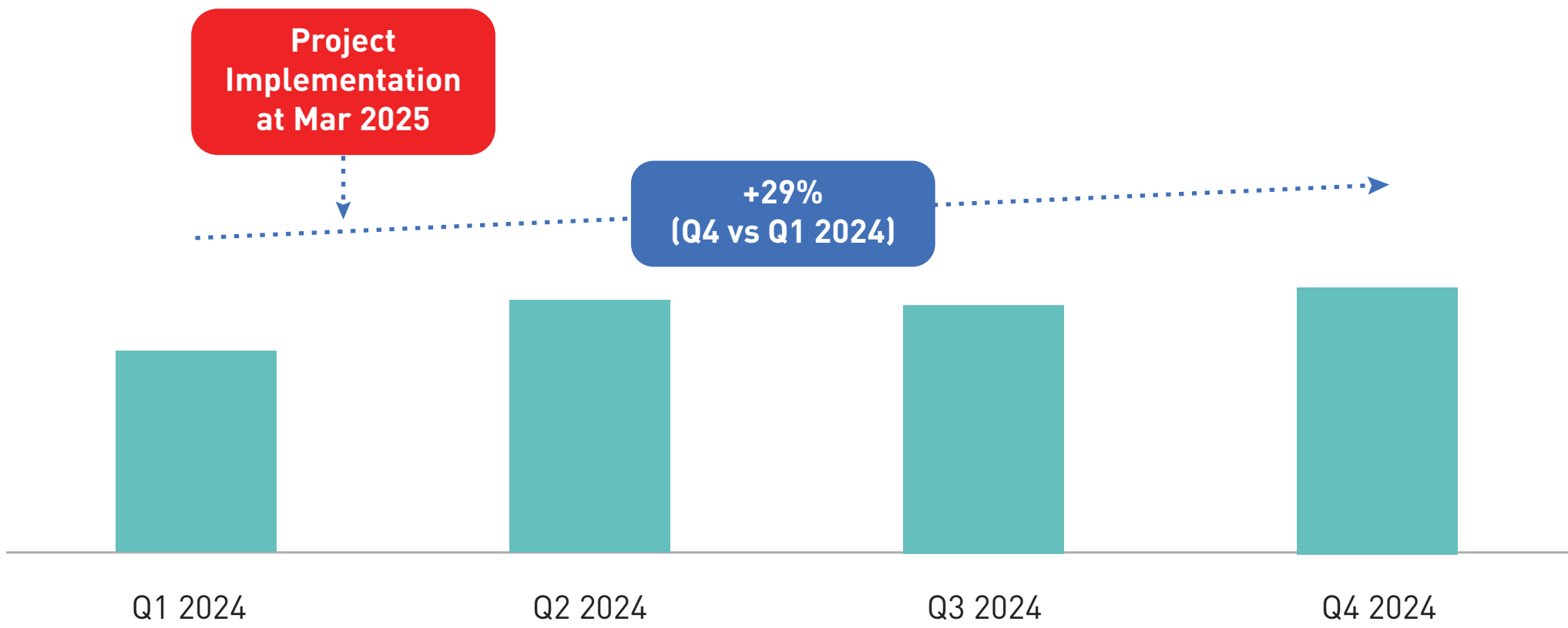
CME by Dr. Jeffrey Jaya Raj



Key Results

A comparative analysis between the first and fourth quarters of 2024 revealed a 29% increase in the patient census for outpatient musculoskeletal (MSK) physiotherapy services, along with a 5% improvement in overall slot utilization.

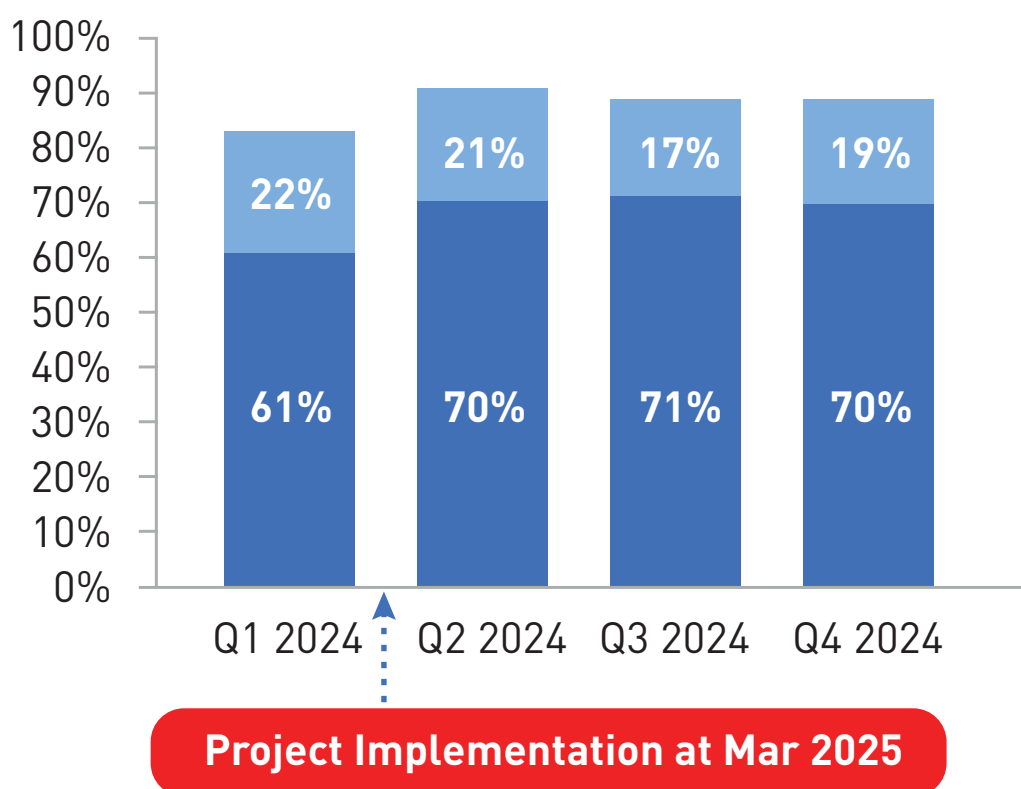
Outpatient MSK Physiotherapy Census 2024



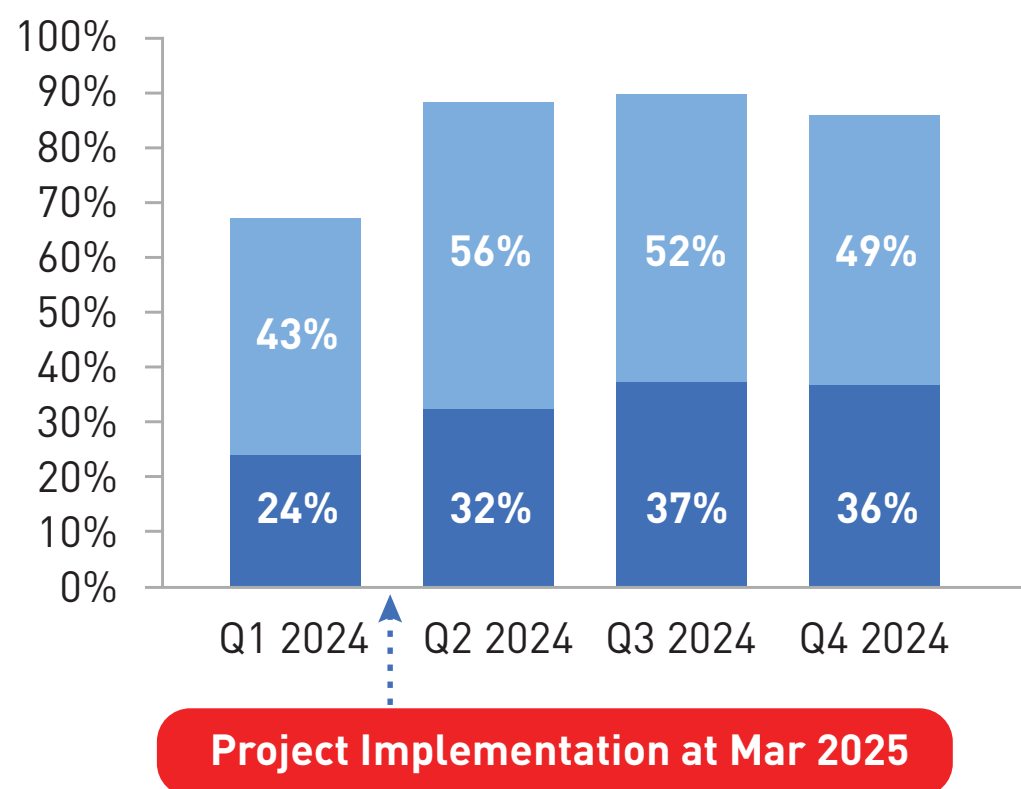
- The project also resulted in a marked reduction in referral-to-appointment waiting time.
- For outpatient clinic referrals, the proportion of appointment slots scheduled within three days improved from 61% in Q1 to over 70% from Q2 onwards.
 - For inpatient discharges, appointments scheduled within three days increased from 24% in Q1 to 36% by Q4.
 - The average number of missed post-discharge referrals, which average of 27 per month in Q1, was completely eliminated from Q3 onwards.

Referral-to-Appointment Waiting Time 2024 (Outpatient MSK Physiotherapy)

Referrals from Outpatient Clinic Referrals



Referrals from Inpatient Discharges



- Note:
- Some patients chose not to proceed with outpatient MSK physiotherapy at Sunway Medical Centre despite receiving referrals.
 - The number of days may be influenced by various factors, such as patient preferences, the type of surgery performed, and other clinical considerations.

In addition, a 17% increase in the average monthly referrals from Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeons was recorded beginning in March 2024, reflecting improved communication and interdisciplinary collaboration. Feedback collected from Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeons after the project's implementation indicated that patients' feedback regarding the unavailability of outpatient MSK physiotherapy appointments were no longer reported.

Conclusion

The project effectively improved access and efficiency in outpatient MSK physiotherapy services by increasing patient volume, ensuring timely scheduled slots and eliminating missed referrals.