Telehealth and store-and-forward technology to improve access to the John Hunter Hospital (JHH) Ear Nose and Throat Service (ENT)

Aim Statement: “To decrease the number of paediatric ENT patients who meet the clinical criteria and live in the Armidale region travelling unnecessarily to the John Hunter Hospital for an ENT Outpatient appointment with participating ENT consultants by 50% by December 2018”

Background to problem worth solving
Long waitlist for non-urgent/routine ENT Outpatient appointments at the JHH
JHH ENT provides a service to a diverse population group over a large geographical area, making access difficult for some patients
Community desire to increase local ENT services in rural locations within HNELHD
Need to upskill local GPs in the assessment, management and appropriate & timely referral of patients with ENT-related issues

Results Implementation of this pilot project is still ongoing. However, early evaluation of the first two ENT Telehealth Clinics has occurred.

Of the eight patients seen, three appointments resulted in a Telehealth link between the patient and GP in Armidale Hospital and the ENT specialist at the JHH. The Telehealth appointments resulted in:

- A total of 4515km travel saved by avoiding a trip to the JHH
- An estimated saving of $9297.45 to patients and their carers
- An estimated 4 days away from home/school/work saved
- 0.5098 total tonnes of carbon emissions saved

Results continued
100% patient attendance rate in the Armidale Clinics (versus 10% DNA rate at JHH clinics)*
GP assessment and documentation via a templated form and store and forward of images so far adequate in allowing ENT Specialist to determine appropriate patient management remotely in all cases
Increase capacity for initial appointments for the ENT service via the use of an ENT GP
Increased capacity within consultant clinic with patients being followed-up by ENT GP remotely

Balancing measures:
Changes have not caused any issues in other parts of the system However, it will be important to measure/take into account:
The impact of additional patients seen via Telehealth on ENT Specialists Surgical waitlist
Ability to ensure face-to-face appointment in a timely manner when needed
Ensure patient satisfaction with the telehealth encounter

The overall outcomes of this project were to:
1. Identify initial paediatric patients on the current waiting list to be seen in outpatients and engage them via a telehealth encounter
2. Increase education and training of GPs in common ENT conditions
3. To increase in-person capacity for review at John Hunter ENT OPD
4. To reduce multiple either review or post op clinic reviews to again increase capacity in the OPD.

Plans to sustain change
1. Standardisation- Systems have been developed which can be replicated at other sites.
2. Documentation- Development of a service agreement between the JHH and Armidale Hospital to document the scope and administrative running of the clinics
4. Training- GP upskilling and education will support the sustainability of this project

Plans to spread/share change
Submitted to the ACI Innovation Exchange
Planned:
Achieve executive support for ongoing co-ordinator role in OPD
Publish findings in Australian journal of Otolaryngology
Present at ASOHNS 2019

References:
Smith AC, Dowthwaite S, Agnew J, Wootton R