

Summary

REDESIGNING BREAST CANCER DIAGNOSTICS

This project rethinks the way the Breast Cancer Diagnostic Centre at Oslo University Hospital handles the entire referral and diagnostic process. The result is a 90% reduction in waiting time from a patient's first visit with her general practitioner (GP) through her final diagnosis at the hospital: from up to 12 weeks down to an average of 7 days. This represents a dramatic improvement in efficiency, a huge improvement in quality of life for patients in a tremendously stressful period of time, and potentially saved lives.

Oslo University Hospital is the largest hospital in Scandinavia, a massive public organization. It's not often easy to make any sort of change within such a system, but the collaborative, visual, and iterative nature of the design work made it possible for the hospital staff to work together as a team to envision a new system. The designers successfully used patient insight to convince hospital management of the urgency, visualizations to communicate workarounds, prototyping to test and co-creation to ensure feasibility.

In the past, referrals and diagnostics was structured around the professionals' routines. Everything was segmented, with no point of contact through the process. The result was an inefficient and incoherent experience, with little support for a highly sensitive user group. While the women felt as a breast cancer patient the moment she or her GP discovered a lump in her breast, the hospital didn't really treat her as a patient until she got diagnosed with cancer.

The designers created a patient journey with new back-stage routines around the existing diagnostic tools, resulting in a team-based daily structure that could process patients through to final diagnosis and treatment plan in 4 days. The tools and tests used for diagnosis, such as MRIs and mammographies, remain the same. The new system, because of its simplicity and reliance on new human processes, not technology, was in place as the new system less than a year after the project began, and showed immediate results. The service has been up and running since November 2013, and all patients referred to the hospital for breast diagnostics, go through this new system.