Flow Charting

Flow charting is a technique used to show the individual steps of a process in a sequential order. In quality improvement, flow charting is used to graphically show the actual steps of a process in comparison to the ideal steps of a process. Flow charting can reveal duplicate, missing, or out-of-order steps in a process. It can also be used as a communication tool for explaining the process, assigning responsibility, and estimating time.

Creating a Flow Chart

1. Bring together the individuals responsible for implementing the process.

2. Define the process to be diagrammed.

3. Discuss and decide the scope of the process. For example, where or when does the process start? Where or when does it end?

4. Determine the level of detail to be included in the diagram.

5. Brainstorm all the steps in the process without putting them in a particular order. Use cards, sticky-notes, or any method that records each step individually and enables them to be put them in an order.

6. Arrange the steps into a sequence.

7. Discuss and confirm the steps and their sequence are correct.

8. Draw arrows between the steps to show the flow of the process.

9. Review the flow chart with stakeholders to finalize the flow chart and gain consensus.

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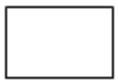
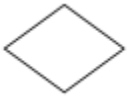
Commonly Used Symbols in Detailed Flowcharts



One step in the process; the step is written inside the box. Usually, only one arrow goes out of the box.

Direction of flow from one step or decision to another.



Decision based on a question. The question is written in the diamond. More than one arrow goes out of the diamond, each one showing the direction the process takes for a given answer to the question. (Often the answers are “yes” and “ no.”)

Delay or wait

Link to another page or another flowchart. The same symbol on the other page indicates that the flow continues there.

Input or output

Document

Alternate symbols for start and end points

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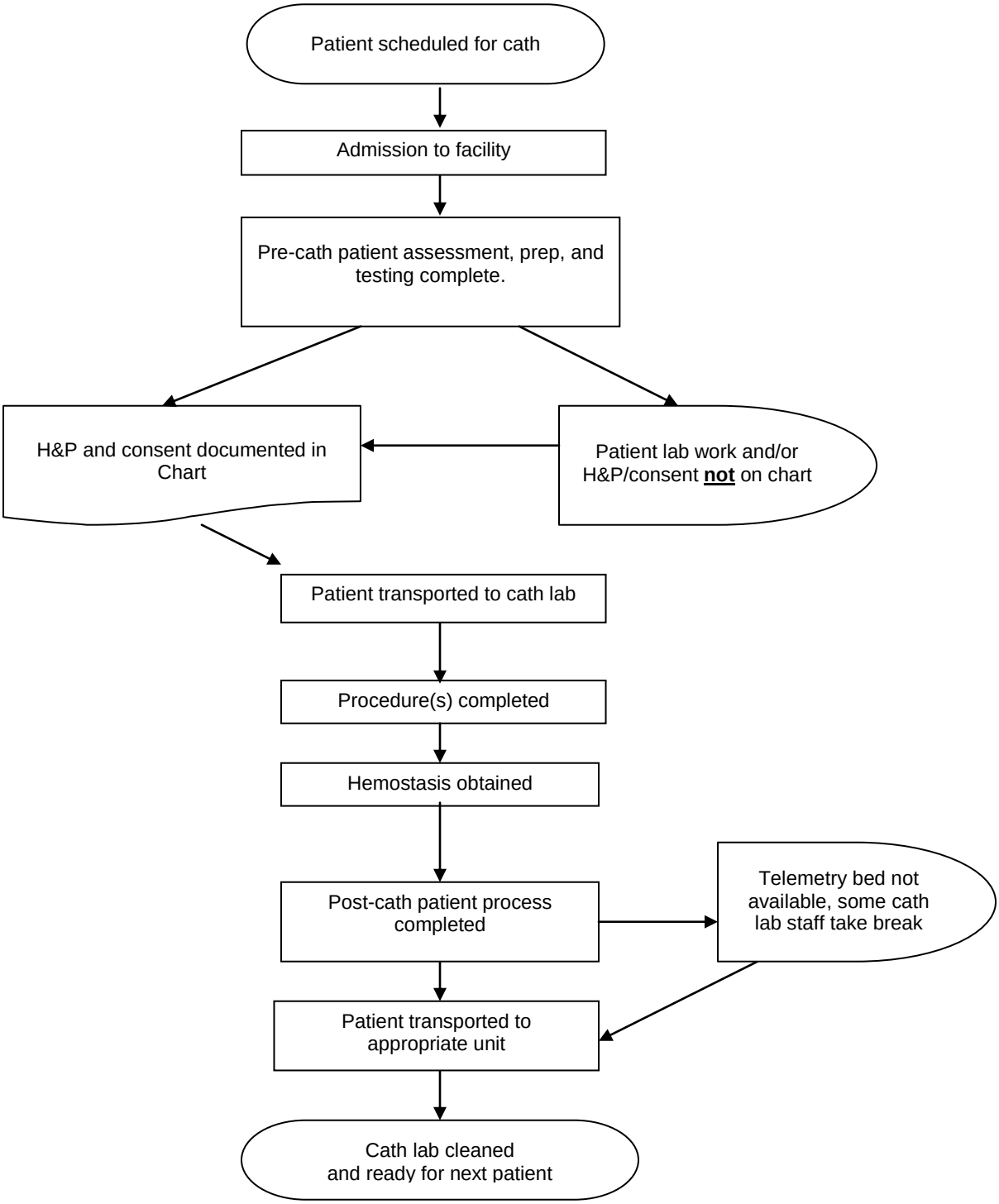
Example of a Detailed Flowchart



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