



SWOT ANALYSIS GUIDANCE FOR



SERVICE GUIDANCE

DERMATOLOGY SERVICES

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Updated: August 2013**

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Introduction

SWOT analysis looks at your Dermatology department's strengths and weaknesses, and the opportunities and threats your service faces.

By focusing on the key factors affecting your service, now and in the future, a SWOT analysis provides a clear basis for examining your department's performance and service.

This guidance outlines:

- Typical strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and how to identify them.
- How to use SWOT analysis to drive your service forward.

1. Self-analysis

SWOT analysis should be used as part of the regular process for reviewing your department's performance.

You may also want to carry out a SWOT analysis in preparation for increasing your department service budgets or before bringing in external consultants to review your service.

1.1 Decide who to involve

Key participants should include your Finance Department, Dermatology Staff and Divisional General Managers from the Trust. Involve other relevant departments to get a fuller picture and help to gain their commitment to the process.

Find out what your service user think about your service by undertaking a patient satisfaction survey.

1.2 Brainstorm the Issues

- Ask everyone involved to identify any strengths or weaknesses they feel the department has, and any opportunities or threats they think the service faces (internal and external influences).
- Encourage participants to make suggestions without trying to judge how important the issue is.
- Concentrate especially on identifying weaknesses and threats.
- Be aware that lack of honesty is a common problem. For example, most people find it easier to identify strengths and opportunities, particularly if the performance of key people (including you) is one of the weaknesses.
- You may want to use checklists to prompt further suggestions (see 2, 3, 4 and 5).
- Organise related ideas into groups. Recording suggestions on Post-it notes or cards that can be moved around and rearranged makes this easier to view.

- Consider bringing in sympathetic outsiders who know your service and market (e.g. patients, commissioners and Health Watch).
- Some departments may find engaging an external consultant useful for their first SWOT analysis. The Clinical Services Unit at the BAD may also be able to assist your department with this task.

1.3 Assess the importance of the issues that have been identified

To help you, use relevant activity data from your department and similar services regionally which compare with your services demographic and geographic profile ([see NHS Benchmarking Tool](#)).

Update your conclusions from any previous department SWOT analysis.

Assess whether your department strengths (or weaknesses) give your services a significant competitive advantage (or disadvantage). For example, your strong research and development programme is useless unless you have the resources to make the most of the results. Do not be surprised if certain factors crop up as both a strength and a weakness.

1.4 Create a simple, clear action plan

There is no point holding a SWOT analysis if it does not result in action. Involve key staff in helping to draw up the action plan to get their commitment and buy-in.

Set out what will be done to address weaknesses, capitalise on opportunities and deal with threats (see 6). This includes the steps to be taken, the personnel who will be involved, the timeframes and the budget.

2. Strengths

Your strengths are usually easy to identify, through your continuing discussions with patients, commissioners and Trust Management. Activity data from your department's outpatient, day case and inpatient services will also help to suggest where further areas could be developed. For most departments, strengths will fall into four distinct categories.

2.1 Sound finances may give you advantages

Important factors might include:

- Positive cashflow being generated by the department.
- Potential for demonstrable future growth of the services and additional profit.

2.2 Marketing may be the key to your success

For example, your department may enjoy:

- A good service reputation, patients want to be referred to your services

- GPs want to refer patients to your services.
- Facilities which provide a wide range of Dermatology treatments.
- A skilled workforce covering all levels of care (community acute and tertiary care).

2.3 Management, personnel skills and systems

These elements are equally important and can influence a department success.

These may include factors such as:

- Supportive and proactive management for the Dermatology department.
- The ability to consult with all parties involved and make decisive decisions.
- Skilled employees, successful recruitment, and effective training and development.
- Good staff motivation and morale.
- Efficient administration and IT systems.

2.4 Strengths may include the right location, premises and facilities

The department's service may benefit from:

- Modern and low-cost maintenance facilities.
- A good location, easily accessible by public transport and car parking facilities.
- Effective purchasing and good relationships with suppliers.
- Be aware that strengths are not always what they seem. Strengths may also be weaknesses and often imply threats for example; your Consultant Lead may be a strength — until he resigns.

3. Weaknesses

Your weaknesses are often known but ignored. A SWOT analysis should be the starting point for tackling under performance in your service.

3.1 Poor financial management may result in situations where:

Not enough funds are available for investment in any new Dermatology services, equipment or facilities.

Budgets for the department may be tied up in Divisional Budgets, supporting other services within the Trust. This weakens the value of the department and makes it hard for commissioners to identify the value of services.

3.2 Lack of marketing focus may lead to:

- Unresponsive attitudes to patient complaints, feedback and treatment requirements.
- A limited range of treatment and available facilities.

- Complacency and a failure to innovate.
- Underestimating the impact on the department from other providers when new services are commissioned.

3.3 Management and personnel weaknesses are often hard to recognise

Typical examples may include:

- Failure to have recruitment strategies and contingencies in place for departments.
- Expertise and control is locked up in a few key personnel.
- Inability to take outside professional advice.
- High staff turnover.

3.4 Inefficient systems, premises and equipment can undermine any service, however hard people work

Typical problems include:

- Poor location and shabby premises.
- Outdated facilities and equipment which slows up the treatment of patients.
- Long leases or PFIs tying the service to unsuitable premises or equipment.
- Inefficient processes and IT systems to support the department.

4. Opportunities

External changes provide opportunities that well-managed services can turn to their advantage.

4.1 Changes involving organisations and individuals which directly affect your service may open up completely new possibilities

For example:

- Deterioration in a private provider performance, or termination of the service contract.
- Merging of Trusts to Foundation status may provide access to potential new patients and markets to influence.
- The opportunity to take on new employees to expand services.
- Additional funding to support new services or expansion of the department.

4.2 The broader service environment may shift in your favour. However, this may also change to your disadvantage

This may be caused by:

- Political agendas, legislative or regulatory change.

- Social developments; for example, demographic changes or changing patient needs leading to an increase in demand for your service.
- New technology; for example, new treatment therapies and information technology.

5. Threats

Threats can be minor or could possibly destroy the business.

5.1 Changes involving organisations and individuals that directly affect your service can have far-reaching effects

For example:

- The commissioning of new services and providers within your service locality.
- Loss of a significant patient referrals
- Failure by new providers to meet their service specification requirements, (cherry picking and mismanagement of patients).
- Locally agreed tariffs with commissioners which do not cover treatment costs.
- Skilled staff leaving with key knowledge for the department.
- No recruitment being undertaken to replace key staff before they leave the department.

6. Action

The results of SWOT analysis — and the action needed — may be different for every department.

6.1 Capitalise on opportunities that play to your service strengths

Opportunities that match your service strengths may prompt the department to follow a strategy of expansion.

The SWOT analysis may also suggest other strategic options for example:

- Moving away from areas of significant threat to more promising opportunities.
- Focusing on turning around service weaknesses in areas of significant opportunity.
- Taking defensive measures in areas of threat where the service is weak.

6.2 Address your weaknesses

Decide which weaknesses need to be addressed first. Other weaknesses must be acknowledged and respected until time and resources allow a solution.

Some weaknesses have a clear solution. For example, services weakness might be solved by recruiting new personnel to expand the service and increase income.

Some weaknesses will take time and money to address. For example, you may need to start a programme of improvements through investment, recruitment, training, or quality management.

6.3 Protect your department against threats

For example:

- Build relationships with GPs, commissioners, the public and patients.
- Promote good employee relations.
- Make sure you have clear and reasonable service contracts with commissioners.
- Draw up realistic contingency plans to cope with possible crises.

SWOT Analysis Template

State what you are assessing here _____

(This particular example is for a new business opportunity. Many criteria can apply to more than one quadrant. Identify criteria appropriate to your own SWOT situation.)

Criteria Examples

Advantages of proposition?
Capabilities?
Competitive advantages?
USP's (unique selling points)?
Resources, Assets, People?
Experience, knowledge, data?
Financial reserves, likely returns?
Marketing - reach, distribution, awareness?
Innovative aspects?
Location and geographical?
Price, value, quality?
Accreditations, qualifications, certifications?
Processes, systems, IT, communications?
Cultural, attitudinal, behavioural?
Management cover, succession?
Philosophy and values?

Strengths

Weaknesses

Criteria Examples

Disadvantages of proposition?
Gaps in capabilities?
Lack of competitive strength?
Reputation, presence and reach?
Financials?
Own known vulnerabilities?
Timescales, deadlines and pressures?
Cashflow, start-up cash-drain?
Continuity, supply chain robustness?
Effects on core activities, distraction?
Reliability of data, plan predictability?
Morale, commitment, leadership?
Accreditations, etc?
Processes and systems, etc?
Management cover, succession?

Criteria Examples

Market developments?
Competitors' vulnerabilities?
Industry or lifestyle trends?
Technology development and innovation?
Global influences?
New markets, vertical, horizontal?
Niche target markets?
Geographical, export, import?
New USP's?
Tactics: e.g., surprise, major contracts?
Business and product development?
Information and research?
Partnerships, agencies, distribution?
Volumes, production, economies?
Seasonal, weather, fashion influences?

Opportunities

Threats

Criteria Examples

Political effects?
Legislative effects?
Environmental effects?
IT developments?
Competitor intentions - various?
Market demand?
New technologies, services, ideas?
Vital contracts and partners?
Sustaining internal capabilities?
Obstacles faced?
Insurmountable weaknesses?
Loss of key staff?
Sustainable financial backing?
Economy - home, abroad?
Seasonality, weather effects?