Application of VSM as a Lean Tool in a Healthcare Facility

M. A. Karim, M. A. H. Mithu, Tarequl Islam, Nayan Bhowal, Hadi Ahmed

Abstract: ***The healthcare industry can be termed as one of the most important sectors of the economy. Healthcare industries are trying to adopt lean management principles in order to maintain quality service to patients, optimize workflow, and eliminate waste. Among the lean management tools, value stream mapping (VSM) is a key tool that uses a flowchart to depict, analyze, and improve the actions involved in the system. The aim of the study is to model the system through value stream mapping to identify wastes and non-value-adding activities in the processes so that the system can get rid of bottlenecks, constraints, and wastes. Sylhet Women's Medical College Hospital is chosen to conduct the study. The necessary data are collected by interviewing employees and patients at outdoor and indoor departments, as well as by direct observation and going through previous records. eVSM software is used for creating current and future value stream maps. The total waiting time, processing time, and lead time of the processes of outdoor departments and diagnostic centers of the hospital are measured and improved over the existing system in the proposed model of the value stream map. Although the proposed model cannot be implemented, it is clear from this study that VSM can ensure smooth healthcare service and enhance performance.***

Keywords: ***Healthcare, Value Stream Mapping, eVSM software, Lean Manufacturing.***

I. INTRODUCTION

The history of lean in healthcare dates back only a few years. Lean originated from the Toyota Production System (TPS) manufacturing process [1]. Since the mid-1950s, Toyota has been well-known for its efficiency, quality, and employee involvement. Today, lean has become the standard for efficiency and excellence in the manufacturing industry.

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However, in the last few years, the healthcare industry has succeeded in deploying lean principles to achieve quality in its operations and processes [2]. Nowadays, there is an increasing demand for healthcare services, which creates challenges for hospitals in terms of cost and efficiency. Thus, healthcare professionals in many countries around the world are struggling to provide competent and safe care while being pushed to optimize the use of resources [3, 4]. The importance of adopting lean principles in healthcare organizations has attracted the focus of several researchers to study the consequential benefits of lean application in healthcare. Tay [5]. attempted to investigate how organizations can systematically focus on flow efficiency by considering the role and value of redundancy in Lean improvement projects. The researcher found that redundancy plays a crucial role in making it possible for the goals of lean improvement projects to be achieved. Spagnol *et al* [6]. concluded that to deliver world-class healthcare in the face of constrained resources and greater demand, a long-term vision and world-class leadership should be developed to sustain the initiative and insert lean into the DNA of healthcare organizations. They also tried to focus on lean healthcare implementation and Toyota's rules to overcome barriers.

Radnor *et al*. [7][17][18] discussed four multi-level case studies of the implementation of lean in the NHS (National Health Service), UK. The work was vast. Their results showed that the application of specific tools, such as 'kaizen blitz' and 'rapid improvement events', which tend to produce small-scale and localized productivity gains. They also identified two crucial breaches of the lean tenets that result from significant contextual differences between manufacturing and healthcare. A few years later, Schonberger [8][19][20][21] illustrated the approach to lean by drawing from a case study that showed that the keys to success including high rates of saving lives and lean healthcare in general, boil down to just five lean methodologies, each focused on quick response. At the same time, Narayanamurthy *et al*. [9] developed a lean readiness framework and an assessment methodology using fuzzy-based method to measure the readiness of healthcare institutions for implementing lean. Lean healthcare, when practiced in this way, can be a continuous improvement tool to become a 'true experts' in the processes of healthcare, including patients/families, healthcare providers, and supporting staff [10-12]. Toussaint and Berry [13] tried to implement lean and presented six principles that constitute the essential dynamic of lean management: attitude of continuous improvement, value creation, unity of purpose, respect for front-line workers, visual tracking, and flexible regimentation.

Therefore, it is found that lean manufacturing procedures, when properly implemented, help manufacturers boost quality and profits while significantly reducing inventory, downtime, expenses, and production cycles. As a result of minimizing waste and waiting times, lean management in healthcare facilities refers to a collection of operating philosophies and techniques that work to maximize value for both patients and the organization.

Nowadays, a variety of lean tools are employed in the healthcare industry, including Kaizen, 5S, value stream mapping (VSM), Poka-Yoke, standardized work, kanban systems, etc. Among them, VSM is one of the most promising candidates in the service sector. It uses flowcharts to represent each stage of the process. By creating a visual representation of the current state and future state of the value stream, VSM enables organizations to identify areas of bottlenecks, waste reduction, and opportunities for improvement. VSM is, therefore, a tool for improving workplace productivity that combines material processing steps with information flow and other crucial related data that identify waste, shorten process cycle times, and implement process improvements. As VSM has been used in the manufacturing sector for many years, it is currently considered a key tool for implementing lean in healthcare systems [14-16].

This study focuses on how, in the context of Bangladesh, healthcare systems could be affected by the use of VSM as a lean tool. Additionally, by utilizing lean principles and procedures to create healthcare organizations that are more patient-centered in their decisions and processes. It should be ensured that all members of staff, including clinicians, nurses, physicians, and administrative staff, can take part in identifying and eliminating areas of waste and inefficiency. Therefore, the main objectives of this study are to develop a current state value stream mapping model for the purpose of identifying and eliminating waiting time, admission time, collection time, patient journey time, scheduling time, and to identify avoidable and reducible process steps and non-value adding activities by suggesting a proposed future state model of VSM and reduced lead time to increase profitability.

II. STYDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study focused on conducting research at Sylhet Women's Medical College Hospital, which involved a thorough investigation and analysis of the complex system. The specific areas for investigation are selected, and data sheets are prepared to collect necessary information through direct observation and discussions with doctors, nurses, patients, and other stakeholders. To get a view of the current situation of facilities and process steps, the system was observed directly to identify value-added and non-value-added activities and steps, unavoidable and reducible waiting times, queuing systems, and information and service flow routes. The information gathered is used to create a current state value stream map, which helps to identify bottlenecks, constraints, and waste in each process step. The calculated values include the total waiting time, lead time, and process time of the current system and the flow percentage and route traversals of each route of the current state value stream mapping. After the preparation of the current state map, the hospital was visited to discuss the accuracy and credibility of the current state VSM model with subject matter experts.

After analyzing the entire system using the current state VSM, remedial actions to address various variables and constraints, identify areas for improvement, and reduce non-value-adding activities are proposed to implement these changes. The data were inputted into VSM software, and the total waiting time, lead time, and process time of the proposed model were calculated and compared with the current state map. The scenarios have been developed so that the system can eliminate various wastes and constraints. The performance of the proposed models of VSM and simulation was compared against the current state model, and improvement strategies have been suggested. 'Quick transactional pro' type eVSM modeling software is used in this study. MS Excel is used to show the various trends of changing variables with respect to time.

III. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Process engineering principles indicate that for process evaluation, 30 measurements should be adequate to establish statistical significance. So, 30 measurements were performed for each data point. As the whole system is complex, the proper areas to be investigated are selected from the patient's perspective. These areas were selected because they have challenging goals in providing value to customers and increasing clinical productivity. These areas are: indoor departments and emergency, admission counter and account desk, outdoor departments, pathology lab, and diagnostic center. The number of incoming patients at outdoor departments is collected after thirty days of observation. The average number of incoming patients at various outdoor departments is shown in Fig. 1.

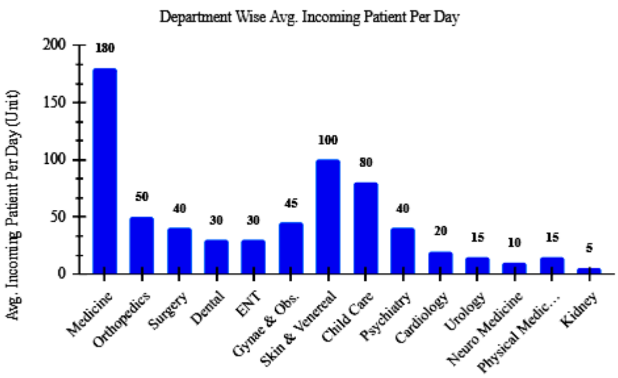

Fig. 1. Average Number of Incoming Patients In Outdoor Departments.

For creating current state map, the summarized data taken by observing current facilities and process steps are used. Firstly, it is important to identify who is making requests and who is providing particular services. Then, the steps required for getting the service are identified, which helped in identifying the issues and constraints.

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In this study, eVSM software is used for mapping the value stream of the healthcare system. The eVSM module was 'quick transactional pro'. The current state value stream mapping was created separately to avoid complexity. Thus, the current state VSM contains-

1. VSM of outdoor departments
2. VSM diagnostic center and pathology lab

To receive the service, patients made the request to be prescribed by the doctors. Thus, the outdoor VSM contains following steps-

1. Waiting in the queue of outdoor ticket counter.
2. Name registration and ticket collection.
3. Waiting in the waiting room.
4. Consultation by Residential surgeon or Professors at the specific outdoor departments.

According to the number of incoming patients, five departments were selected for creating the VSM. These are Medicine, Orthopedics, Surgery, ENT, and Gynecology departments. Processing time, lead time, waiting time in each server, number of resources in each server, the number of on-duty doctors in these selected departments, average incoming patients per day, etc. are the basic inputs required to create the model in eVSM software. The current VSM of these outdoor departments are illustrated in Fig. 2.

Statistical data, such as lead time, waiting time, and route utilization, can be recorded and be created reports in eVSM. eVSM is integrated with Microsoft technologies. It includes Visual Basic for Applications, so models can be further automated if specific algorithms are needed. It also supports importing Microsoft Visio flowcharts, as well as reading from or sending output to Excel spreadsheets and Access databases. It executes some manual calculations and shows the outputs after the completion of the model run. The output of the outdoor eVSM is illustrated in Table I for an incoming 350 patients per day.

Table- I: Output of the Outdoor VSM

Route	Route Name	Route %	Longest lead time (Minutes)	Total Wait (Hr.)	Total processing time (Hr.)	Processing time (%)
1	Medicine	49.60	37.20	0.62	0.15	24.32
3	Gyne and Obs.	14.80	27.00	0.45	0.20	44.44
2	Orthopedics	14.80	25.80	0.43	0.17	38.46
5	ENT	10.40	21.00	0.35	0.12	33.33
4	Surgery	10.40	31.20	0.52	0.20	38.71
Average		100.00	31.80	0.53	0.16	31.83

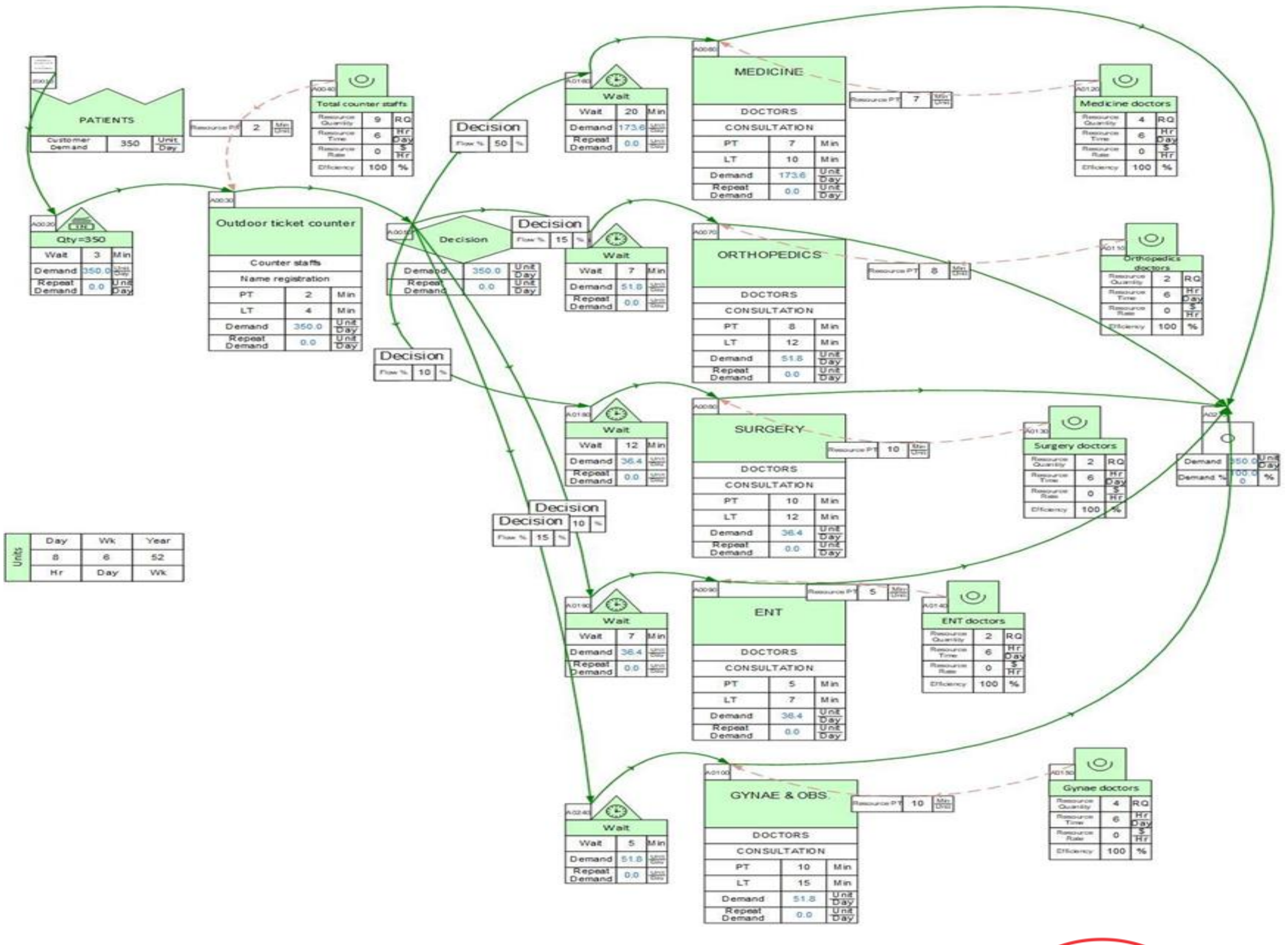

Fig. 2 VSM of Outdoor Departments

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The VSM of the diagnostic center and pathology lab includes the following processing steps-

1. Doctor's consultation in indoors/outdoors.
2. Prescribing the required test by the doctors.
3. Making the payment at the reception counter of the diagnostic center.
4. Deciding the type of diagnosis.
5. Execution of X-ray, ultrasound, or echocardiogram (ECG).
6. Sample collection from the patients such as blood or urine.
7. Analyzing the batches of samples by the analyzer machines.
   Preparing the necessary reports by the consultants.
8. Review the reports by the pathologists.
9. Delivering the report from the reception counter.

The output of the diagnostic center and pathology lab eVSM is illustrated in Table II.

Table- II: Output of Diagnostic Center and Pathology Lab VSM

Route	Route Name	Route %	Longest lead time (Minutes)	Total Wait (Hr.)	Total processing time (Hr.)	Processing time (%)
1	Pathology test	49.20	0.32	7.80	0.68	8.80
2	Ultrasound	20.00	0.03	0.75	0.23	31.00
3	X-Ray	15.60	0.04	0.92	0.33	36.00
4	ECG	15.20	0.03	0.75	0.25	33.00
1	Pathology test	49.20	0.32	7.80	0.68	8.80
Average		100.00	0.18	4.22	0.47	21.30

The models are validated with real-time collected data. After creating the maps, a discussion was held with the subject matter experts, doctors, and staff about whether the models reflect the current state of the existing system. Additionally, they are asked whether something is left or needs to be added to complete the model.

A. Evaluation of Types of Waste

VSM helps in finding waste in the whole area under investigation. The outdoor of the hospital and the diagnostic center were modeled using VSM to identify non-value-adding activities and waste. There are seven types of waste in lean management. These are conveyance, motion, waiting, over-processing, inventory, defects, and overproduction. Wastes are identified in the current state of VSM so that they can be easily eliminated or reduced during the improvement phase. In outdoors, the number of seats in the waiting room was inadequate to serve the patients. It was found that the doctors were not present at the right time, which resulted in a longer waiting time. At the outdoor ticket counter, there were four counter staff. It was adequate, but when patients came in large numbers, they were unable to provide a queue-less service.

In the diagnostic center, the doctors who prescribed the tests were sometimes not available, which resulted in longer waiting time. The patient's data was not organized and coordinated across various departments. The number of staff at the diagnostic reception counter was not enough, which sometimes created long queues in front of the counter. Wastes due to the inefficient flow of information were generated in the sample collection process. The conventional process of sample collection accumulates a significant amount of time. The number of collectors was insufficient in some cases. There were long queues for tests in front of machines such as X-rays, Ultrasounds, CT scans, etc. due to machine breakdowns and limitations in the number of resources. The number of pathologists and technologists was insufficient compared to the patient's demand. Due to the absence of staff, it was found that report review and delivery were taking a longer period of time.

B. Future State Value Stream Mapping

Two current state value stream maps were created from the collected data. These two VSM models can help to identify various constraints and issues affecting process performance. Based on the recommendation from eVSM software, two future state maps are proposed.

a. Future State Map for Outdoor

The future state map is proposed by reducing and avoiding non-value-adding waiting time in the current system. Most of the non-value-adding activities are avoidable by increasing the number of servers. The current resources are inadequate to serve incoming patients. When the

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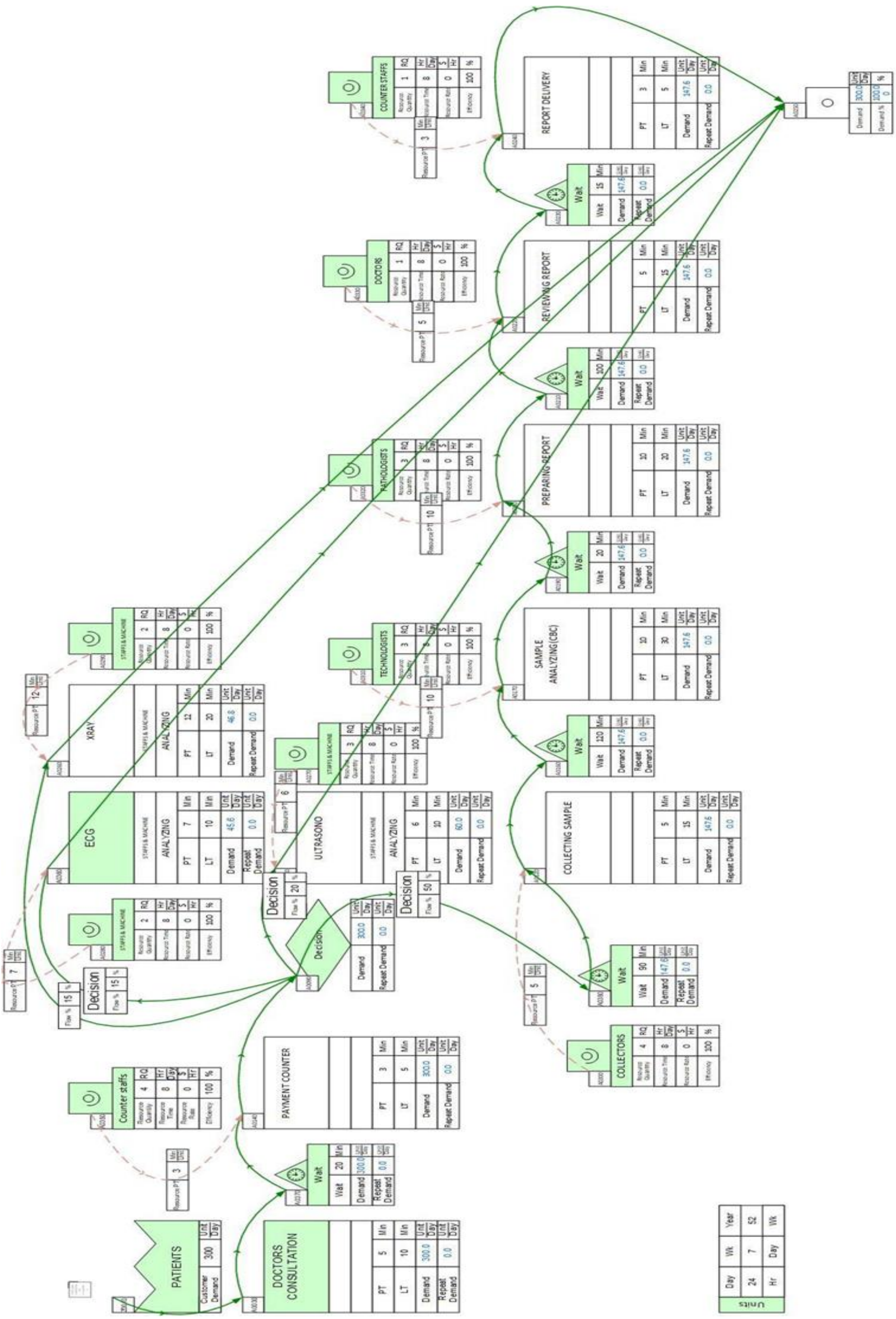

Fig. 3. VSM Model of Diagnostic Center & Pathology Lab

number of servers is increased, patients will experience smoother service and the flow will improve. The non-value-adding average waiting time per patient that can be reduced by balancing resources and servers at each waiting point was taken into consideration in the future state map based on the suggestions of eVSM software, as illustrated in Fig. 3. The non-value-adding waiting time per patient in each department is summarized in Table III.

Table- III: Name of the Table That Justify the Values.

Activities	Non value adding average waiting time (min)	Type
Medicine	20	Avoidable
Orthopedics	7	Avoidable
Surgery	12	Avoidable
ENT	7	Avoidable
Gynecology	5	Avoidable

Additional servers and resources required to avoid the waiting time based on the suggestions from the eVSM software are plotted in Table IV.

Table- IV: Resource Comparison at Each Server at Indoor Department Existing and Proposed VSM Models.

Resource Type	Current State Map	Future State Map
Total counter staffs	9	11
Orthopedics doctors	2	5
Medicine doctors	4	10
Surgery doctors	2	5
ENT doctors	2	3
Gynecology doctors	4	7

The output of the future state map of outdoor VSM is summarized in Table V.

Table- V: Output of the Proposed Model of Outdoor VSM.

Route	Route Name	Route %	Longest lead time (Minutes)	Total Wait (Hr.)	Total processing time (Hr.)	Processing time (%)
1	Medicine	49.60	13.98	0.23	0.15	64.37
3	Gynecology	15.20	19.02	0.32	0.20	63.09
2	Orthopedics	14.80	16.02	0.27	0.17	62.54
5	ENT	10.40	10.98	0.18	0.12	63.90
4	Surgery	10.00	16.02	0.27	0.20	74.90
Average		100.00	15.00	0.25	0.16	64.00

b. Future state map for diagnostic center and lab

The non-value-adding waiting time is summarized in Table VI.

Table VI. Waiting Time at Each Server Per Patient Diagnostic Center and Pathology Lab.

Activities	Non-value adding average waiting time (min)	Type
Payment counter	20	Avoidable
Collecting sample	90	Avoidable
Sample analyzing	120	Avoidable
Preparing report	20	Avoidable
Reviewing report	100	Avoidable
Report delivery	15	Avoidable

Additional servers and resources required to avoid all requirement based on the suggestions from the eVSM software is plotted in Table VII. The outputs of summarized in Table VIII.

Table VII. Resource Comparison at Each Server at the Diagnostic Center and Pathology Lab Existing and Proposed VSM Models.

Resource Type	Current State Map	Future State Map
Staffs & machine_ultrasound	3	6
Staffs & machine_ECG	2	5
Staffs & machine_X-Ray	2	9
Collectors_collecting sample	4	10
Technologists_sample analyzing	3	12
Pathologists_preparing report	3	7
Doctors_reviewing report	1	7
Counter staff_report delivery	1	3
Counter staff_payment counter	4	8

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Table VIII. Output of the Diagnostic Center VSM

Route	Route Name	Route %	Longest lead time (Minutes)	Total Wait (Hr.)	Total processing time (Hr.)	Processing time (%)
1	Pathology test	48.80	0.07	1.67	0.68	41.00
2	Ultrasound	20.40	0.02	0.42	0.23	56.00
3	X-Ray	16.00	0.02	0.58	0.33	57.00
4	ECG	14.80	0.02	0.42	0.25	60.00
Average		100.00	15.00	0.25	0.16	64.00

IV. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The following formula is used to find the output (Table IX) and the result of the existing and proposed VSM models of indoor departments and diagnostic centers based on resource balancing in each server:

$$\text{value-added percentage} = \frac{\text{Value added time}}{\text{Total time}}$$

Table IX. Result of the Existing and Proposed VSM Models of Healthcare Facilities

VSM Model	Value added time (hour)	Total time (hour)	Value added (%)
Current state of outdoor VSM	0.16	0.53	30.19%
Proposed future state of outdoor VSM	0.16	0.25	64.00%
Current state of diagnostic center VSM	0.47	4.22	11.14%
Future state of diagnostic center VSM	0.47	1.05	44.76%

V. DISCUSSION

This study depicts the significance of a single lean tool named VSM. There are many other lean tools, besides the VSM, that can be implemented in healthcare, such as kaizen, 5s, and visual control. This study does not discuss their significance. Many clinics and hospitals are not suitable for implementing Lean tools and techniques. Also, the costs of the increased resources in the proposed model were not taken into account. The developed models sometimes do not resemble the actual system. Some of the collected data was obtained by assuming and consulting with subject matter experts. The results of the VSM modeling would have been more accurate if the data could have been collected for a longer period of time and more accurately.

VI. CONCLUSION & FUTURE WORK

During this study, data was collected and system modeling was executed. Although various wastes accumulate indoors, outdoors, and at the diagnostic center, the authorities are not taking the necessary measures to reduce waste accumulation. The total waiting time was measured and improved in the proposed model over the existing system. The lead time of each route was found, and the value-adding processing time was calculated to identify issues and constraints. The source of waste can be identified and eliminated. The study depicts the idea of implementing lean tools and techniques in the healthcare system. The VSM and simulation modeling can also be implemented in many other service industries, such as the banking system, railway stations, airports, etc. Further studies can be performed in many other departments, hospitals, clinics, and medical facilities.

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Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate	No, the article does not require ethical approval and consent to participate with evidence.
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Authors Contributions	All authors have equal participation in this article.

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