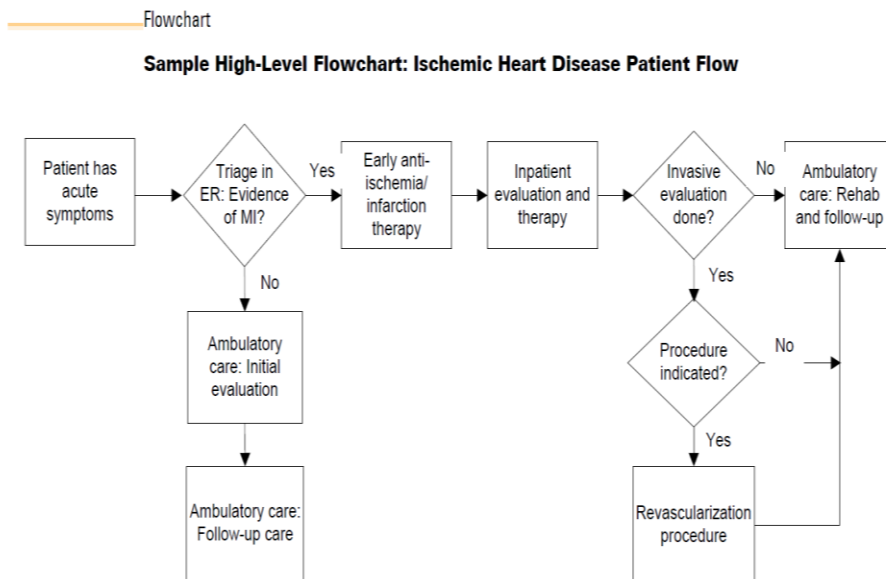


Flow Chart/Process Flow Diagram

A Flow Chart (also known as a Process Flow Diagram or Process Map) is a **diagram** of the **steps in a process** and their sequence. Two types of flow charts are utilized in quality improvement. A **high-level flowchart**, outlining 6-10 major steps, gives a high-level view of a process. These flowcharts display the major blocks of activity, or the major system components, in a process. These charts are especially useful in the early phases of a project and help to set priorities for improvement work. A **detailed flowchart** is a close-up view of the process, typically showing dozens of steps. These flowcharts make it easy to identify complexity, excessive steps, etc. in a process and should be used when you want to standardize or make changes in the process.



There are many types of flow charts/process maps including swim lane, value stream, cross-functional and workflow.

When to Use a Flow Chart

- When you need to define or analyze an existing process.
- When you need to standardize or redesign a process.
- When you need to find areas for improvement in a process such as unnecessary steps, gaps, barriers, etc.

How Flow Charts Are Constructed

1. Identify the goal for creating the flowchart and the level of detail required-high or detailed.
2. Assemble the people who know the process best and outline the process steps.

3. Define the first and last steps in the process.

4. Begin documenting the process steps in sequence. Some steps may be parallel—they happen at the same time. Describe the process as it really exists, not the ideal. Most flow charts are made up of three main types of symbol:

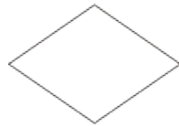
- Elongated circles, which signify the start or end of a process.



- Rectangles or squares which show instructions or actions.



- Diamonds which show decisions that must be made



5. Work through the entire process, showing actions and decisions appropriately in the order they occur. Link these together using arrows to show the flow of the process.

(Tip: Self-adhesive notes are a flexible way to document steps, using one note for each step. This allows you to easily change the order or add new steps.)

6. At decision symbols, choose the most natural branch and continue to the end.

7. Use notes for unfamiliar steps and continue to the end.

8. When you reach the last step, go back to fill in any branches.

9. Follow up on unfamiliar steps and update chart.

10. Validate your flow chart. Work from step to step asking yourself and others if you have correctly represented the sequence of actions and decisions involved in the process.

11. Identify areas for improvement and redesign the process.

A video on Flow charts can be viewed at

<http://www.ihl.org/education/IHIOpenSchool/resources/Pages/BobLloydWhiteboard.aspx#FC>