

Tips For Outpatient Providers on How to Save Time for Your Patients

Happier patients and clients return to your outpatient site and recommend your services to their friends. Your business improves. One way to make your patients happier is by moving them through the system faster while providing a high level of service. Obviously, if you can shorten the time a patient spends at your site, you can get more done.

So what are some ways this can be done? One way is **process mapping**. Process mapping, simply, is the listing of all the steps that a patient must go through from beginning to end when he or she receives service from you. You may think of this as flowcharting the patient's encounter. For you to accurately map the patient's progress, you must first gather together a representative of each type of personnel that the patient will encounter. For instance, you might need to have a receptionist, a nurse, a physician, a lab technician, and office or department manager, who will probably lead the mapping process.

Once together, the team will make a chart of all the steps of the patient. It is important that everyone feels comfortable making comments and adding to the steps. One person should list and modify the steps as the team suggests, connecting the steps in the order of the flow. Be sure to list the steps that go on behind the scene that supports the patient's visit too.

Once everyone believes all the steps are listed, discuss what steps can be eliminated or combined while still maintaining the quality of care. Then, take steps to implement the suggested steps, measuring to see if time is saved while quality is maintained. As reported in the Wall Street Journal on April 9, 2004, one group found they could eliminate 51 steps from 68 steps in a pneumonia patient's visit. Imagine the time they saved for themselves and their patients!

Another way to save time is to look for steps that are done sequentially which in fact could be done concurrently. For example, one hospital emergency room found they could save time for elderly patients who came in with hip injuries. They found that many times these same patients would be admitted to the hospital immediately after the emergency room visit. Because the lengthy admission process was only begun after the injury diagnosis, the patient spent a long

period just waiting for admission. The cure? Since so many were admitted, the hospital decided to initiate the hospital admission process as soon as the patient arrived at the emergency room. Waiting time for patients was drastically reduced.

Some hospitals are now advertising their improved time performance for patients after examining the patient flow process. A hospital in Muskegon, Michigan boasts that their average patient only waits 15 minutes to be seen after entering the emergency room.

So, you can make your patients happier by using these proven quality improvement techniques: process mapping and doing as much as you can concurrently instead of sequentially. Try them out and see how it saves you time and increases patient traffic. If you want to find other ways to improve the quality of your site, then visit www.bryantsstatisticalconsulting.com and sign up for the free monthly newsletter. If you believe a personal contact with a quality improvement specialist would be helpful, then find out how to contact Bryant's Statistical Consulting at this same web site.

Good luck with your quality improvement initiatives.