



Best Practices to Improve Patient Satisfaction: Appointment Availability

When a patient feels ill or needs to follow up with their doctor, quick access to care is imperative to getting their questions answered and having their medical needs addressed. To help you and your office staff manage your patients' expectations about appointment availability and scheduling, we've identified several customer-centered strategies you can implement in your practice.

<p>CAHPS Measures — Survey Questions</p>	<p>Getting Needed Care</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In the last 6 months, how often was it easy to get the care, tests, or treatment you needed? 2. In the last 6 months, how often did you get an appointment to see a specialist as soon as you needed? <p>Getting Appointments and Care Quickly</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In the last 6 months, how often did you get an appointment for a checkup or routine care at a doctor's office or clinic as soon as you needed?* 2. In the last 6 months, when you needed care right away, how often did you get care as soon as you needed?* 3. Wait time includes time spent in the waiting room and exam room. In the last 6 months, how often did you see the person you came to see within 15 minutes of your appointment time?*
<p>Voice of the patient</p>	<p><i>"Sometimes, I have to wait at least a month to get an appointment. Sometimes, I would rather not go to the doctor and I get sicker."</i></p> <p><i>"If I called for an appointment, there would be no appointment on the days I wanted."</i></p> <p><i>"It is usually because their schedules don't meet the patient's needs."</i></p> <p><i>"I am fighting with them saying come in in three months. In three months, I will be dead."</i></p>
<p>What do patients want?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Same-day appointment options ■ Getting an appointment within two weeks of their request ■ Alternative hours (weekends, mornings, evenings) ■ Alternative options if you're unable to accommodate their appointment needs
<p>What you can do in your practice</p>	<p>Open-Access Scheduling (aka advanced access and same-day scheduling)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Allocate time slots to accommodate same-day and walk-in requests ■ Review your schedule the day before. Open slots can be used for walk-in and same-day scheduling ■ Leave half of the schedule open for open-access, as this may help increase retention, referrals, and the incentives you receive from Healthfirst. Book the other half of the schedule only with clinically necessary follow-up visits <p>Patient-Centered Schedules</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Design your schedule to meet patient needs ■ Consider adding expanded hours (before 9am and after 5pm), as well as weekend shifts

What you can do in your practice (Cont.)

Daily Auditing of Schedule

- Your next available appointment should be a priority
- Review your schedule every day and identify where extra slots can be created
- Build slots within your schedule template to accommodate same-day or walk-in appointments

Telemedicine, Phone, Email Consultations, and Record Reviews

- Offer remote appointments and consultations to improve access and satisfaction for patients. They'll be able to reach you from anywhere, instead of finding time in their schedule that fits in with yours

Utilize the Wait List

- Offer to wait-list patients
- If someone cancels, follow up with the wait-listed patients immediately to schedule an earlier appointment

Confirmation Calls

- To reduce no-shows and miscommunication with the appointment time, utilize personal or automated confirmation calls
- Follow up with cancellations that arise from these confirmations
- Book earlier appointments with patients who have been waiting to be seen

Offer an Alternative

- Utilize our provider directory at www.hfdocfinder.org to locate a provider or an in-network Urgent Care Center that can accommodate the patient's request for an earlier appointment
- Your service to the patient will not be forgotten, and you'll be more likely to keep your reputation as a preferred provider

Group Appointments

- Offer group visits for high-risk patients to receive preventive care and deliver health education
- Treating multiple patients at once will be financially beneficial to your practice and will address some of the barriers your patients may have when accessing care

Customer-Centered Approach

- Instead of having your staff offer an appointment that's several weeks away, train them to offer alternative options
- Empathize with the patient. Listen to their preferences and address all their concerns before ending the call
- Build a rapport, show you understand, and be polite

*These measures are also part of the Healthfirst Quality Incentive Program (HQIP).

What must your office team do to maintain a successful relationship with your patients?

- Provide excellent customer service
- Empathize and engage with your patients' health goals

Satisfaction is about showing that you've gone above and beyond the minimum level of care.

We've found that today's patients expect to be seen at your office as soon as possible, and that they desire greater levels of customer service and support to be satisfied and return to your practice. To help increase retention, referrals, and the incentives you receive from Healthfirst, train your team to:

- ✓ Schedule appointments in a timely matter
- ✓ Empathize with patients (regardless of the complexity of their needs)
- ✓ Offer alternative options to obtaining care

To learn more about the areas to focus on for improvement and how to implement best practices, and to find helpful resources and links for both you and your Healthfirst patients, visit www.healthfirst.org/PatientSatisfaction.