Quick Tips for Reducing Patient Cycle Time

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Patient cycle time is the amount of time in minutes that a patient spends in an office visit, beginning at the time of arrival and ending when the patient leaves the office. National benchmarks indicate 30 minutes or 1.5 times the actual "touch time" are target goals for patient cycle time in a practice. (IHI) How can you do this in your practice? Here are some quick tips!

- Start your day on time! This means being ready for the first patient at the appointed time. "Being ready" includes:
  - Pull charts and review information for scheduled visits, at a minimum, a couple days before the appointment;
  - Assemble reports and information necessary for the visit;
  - Contact the patient to identify and schedule lab work etc. to be performed before the visit;
  - Chart information should be available and reviewed prior to entering the exam room;
  - Any necessary imaging and lab work should be returned and reviewed prior to the visit;
  - The patient should be checked in, roomed and prepared for the exam, including the following.
    - Weight and vital signs taken;
    - Patient is appropriately gowned;
    - Tools required to perform the examination are laid out and ready to be used.

- Keep the scheduling process simple by limiting the number of types of clinic appointments. In our study we found that those practices using more than two types of visit times experienced more difficulty staying on schedule. A practice offering one short (10 or 15 minute) visit and one long (20 or 30 minute) visit seemed to work best.

- Be "patient centered" even in your scheduling by taking the patient's needs into consideration. Some need a short appointment early in the day whereas others who have multiple conditions may need a longer appointment later in the day.

- Providers should not try to do it all. "Team care" maximizes the use of skill sets and experience of all the team members. Nursing staff can provide patient education and certain laboratory procedures and referrals while mid-levels can perform follow-up visits for clients with controlled chronic conditions.

- Improve practice processes by periodically performing patient process observations. Conducting process observations will assist the practice in eliminating inefficiencies and procedures which are too time consuming and aid in streamlining care processes. Look at your office through your patient's eyes. Are there extra steps in the process that can be eliminated, like moving the scales closer to where the patients check in? Do you have to leave the exam room to get patient education information?

- Don't lose valuable patient "care time" by looking for exam tools or supplies. Standardize the placement of these items in each patient exam room to minimize the time spent looking for these items and to ensure each room has the proper exam tools (reflex hammers, tuning forks, slides, etc.), patient education materials, and care supplies (cotton balls, bandages, swabs, etc.).

Additional resources:

Find out more about TransforMED's National Demonstration Project (NDP)
http://www.transformed.com/ndp.cfm

Learn about the TransforMED Medical Home model
http://www.transformed.com/transformed.cfm

Read relevant TransforMED workingpapers:

Touch Time Tips
http://www.transformed.com/workingPapers/TouchTimeTips.pdf

Improving the Patient's Experience
http://www.transformed.com/workingPapers/ImprovingPatientExperience.pdf

Huddles: Increased Efficiency in Mere Minutes a Day
http://www.transformed.com/workingPapers/Huddles.pdf