



Success study:

Primary care at Athens District Family Health Team

Situation:

The Athens District Family Health Team (FHT), located within the South East LHIN, serves 3,500 rostered and 300 unrostered patients. In November 2008, the team was experiencing a wait time of 27 days, as measured by the time to the third next available appointment. As a result, the registered nurse had to do telephone triage to fit patients into an already double-booked schedule or offer telephone advice. Long wait times meant the practice's receptionists also experienced stress, fielding a steady stream of calls from anxious patients.

Aim:

Implement same-day scheduling by April 1, 2009 (i.e., wait time of zero days for appointments), maximize office efficiency so that patients are seen on time for their appointments and within a 45-minute period (with 60% of that time spent with a provider), and ensure that patients see their own primary care provider more than 85% of the time.

Measures:

- Average time to third next available appointment
- Office visit cycle time (total time spent by patient in the office from arrival to departure)
- Patient time spent with a provider (value-added time) as a percentage of the office visit cycle time
- Percentage of patient visits where the patient saw his or her primary care provider

Changes:

- Staff met weekly to discuss goals, measurements, challenges and results and implement changes through the Plan-Do-Study-Act process
- Worked down the backlog of appointments by creating 30 extra patient appointments with the physician each week, aiming to arrange appointments the same week they were requested and not pushing any new appointments beyond April 1, 2009
- Cultivated an internal culture that supports quality improvement and respects patients' time, including an emphasis on doing today's work today and scheduling early in the day (to allow same-day appointments for patients who call in the morning) and late in the week for follow-up appointments (because the first part of the week tends to be busier with phone calls)
- Stocked all patient rooms with a complete set of identical supplies and equipment
- Invested in an electronic medical record (EMR) to reduce documentation and file retrieval times
- Explained the changes through a patient brochure and local newspaper advertisement
- Implemented processes to measure success, including a time sheet for patients to complete

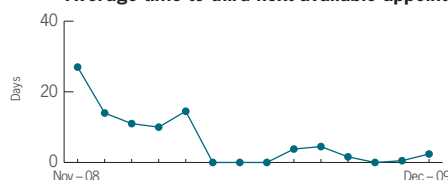
QI team:

The Athens District team includes one family physician, two nurse practitioners and one half-time social worker in partnership with the Quality Improvement & Innovation Partnership (QIIP).

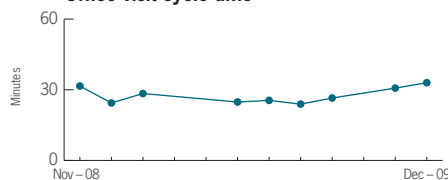
Results:

On April 1, 2009, the wait time to the third next available appointment dropped to zero days from the baseline of 27 days, and it has remained between zero and two days ever since. In addition, the team noticed a significant decrease in time spent on telephone triage for patients who previously couldn't be scheduled in a timely manner. Furthermore, the number of patients seeing their primary care provider as a percentage of total patient visits was maintained above the goal of 85% each month (except for two months due to staff vacations). The FHT has kept the office visit cycle time to 33 minutes, below the target of 45 minutes, and value-added time has been maintained at 61% (at target).

Average time to third next available appointment



Office visit cycle time



Next steps:

Athens District continues to track each of its measures weekly and average them monthly to prevent a relapse to old scheduling habits. The team is also testing other strategies to balance supply and demand, including group medical appointments for patients with diabetes and maximizing the scope of practice of the entire care team. They plan to spread their efficiency measures to other providers within their region.