

Optimizing Patient Check-in and Check-out for your Healthcare Practice

Written by [medmonthly](#) on June 1, 2016 in [Features](#), [Slide](#)



An important aspect of patient experience is monitoring and optimizing patient flow from check-in to clinical practice areas and then to check-out. This movement of patients should be seamless and efficient if you want to make positive brand impressions. Undue wait times, unclear destinations (reception, check-in and check-out counters, etc.) and uncomfortable transitions between physicians or different service areas can have a negative impact on patient experience.

Make your patients feel cared for and comfortable from the time they make an appointment to the time they leave your clinic and your patients will reward you with loyalty.

Here are a few things you can do to ensure good patient flow at your practice office.

Improving Patient Check-in

Positive brand impressions ensure that patients not only come back to you but also encourage them to refer their friends to your practice.

Make it Easy for Patients to reach their Destinations

The last thing you want is for patients to wander around and re-walk a path trying to figure out which counter to visit. Put up signs providing clear directions right from parking to the building, floor, or entrance to your practice office, the check-in counter, different service areas, check-out, and restrooms so your patients know where they need to go.

Carefully Plan Patient Schedules

Scheduling of patients is a tricky situation. Too many patients will not only overburden your practice healthcare provider(s), but it also means longer wait time for your patients. Optimize patient check-in process by encouraging new patients to fill out their registration forms online or ask them to fill the hard copies before arriving for their appointment. Instruct your staff to collect insurance information prior to the actual appointment so they have enough time to verify insurance eligibility and benefits.

Optimize Patient Movement

Aim for a linear patient flow. After check-in, move the patient to financial consultation then to vitals check and consultation with the healthcare provider and then finally to the checkout counter. Ideally, this entire process should happen without patients crossing paths or going back and forth. Encourage patients to provide feedback on their experience and use this to work with your staff on a plan to optimize patient traffic.

Make it Easy for Healthcare Providers to Update EHRs

Moving between examination rooms and the office to update patient EHRs can be taxing for physicians. It also increases patient wait time; the time spent moving back and forth can instead be spent with a patient. Instead, provide a mobile workstation or have an anchored workstation placed at strategic locations. This will not only make it easy for healthcare providers to document in the Electronic Health Record, but it will also effectively bring down patient wait times.

IMPROVE PATIENT EXPERIENCE BY OPTIMIZING PATIENT CHECK-IN AND CHECK-OUT



WHY YOU SHOULD FOCUS ON SMOOTH PATIENT FLOW

- The patient experience**
 Journey starts from moment of arrival, to check-in, to meeting with the physician and then checking out.
- Happy patients**
 are more likely to come back and refer their friends.
- Improved patient flow**
 helps improve practice reputation, creating a positive impact on your practice bottom line.



OPTIMIZE THE DISCOVERY PROCESS

- Practice discovery**
 is increasingly starting in the digital space.
- Make sure your practice website, social pages, and other digital real estate**
 clearly features your practice name, address, contact number(s), directions, and time of operations.
- Simplify online check-in form filling**
 for patients.
- Ensure patients**
 have a convenient parking place to avoid late or missed appointments and frustration.
- Post signs**
 that direct patients to your practice office.



OPTIMIZE THE CHECK-IN PROCESS

Mark the check-in and checkout areas and exam rooms so patients know where they need to go.

You can also provide by download and encourage patients to fill out hard copies of registration forms prior to their actual appointment.

Train your check-in staff to be personable and sincere when dealing with repeat or first time patients.

Set realistic scheduling goals so patients are not left waiting and healthcare providers are not overly burdened.

Improve the check-in process by collecting and verifying patient insurance information before the actual appointment.

Encourage patients to use your patient portal to complete their registration paperwork.

Introduce the patient to the check-out team/staffer who will be dealing with his or her case.

Train your team to be personable and helpful when communicating with the patient.

Your staff should provide clear instructions on billing.

The final impression for a patient typically is the check-out and billing area.

Provide patients with

OPTIMIZE THE CHECK-OUT PROCESS



Improving Patient Check-out

The last stop for a patient is the check-out and billing area. Here are a few considerations to keep in mind as you plan the last step of your patient's visit.

Ensure Seamless Transition

A good practice to maintain positive brand impressions is to escort your patient(s) to the check-out area. Provide instructions to patients on how they can proceed if they need lab tests or need a physician referral and/ or if they need to call and schedule or walk-in for their appointment. Patient understanding is important so make sure your patients understand the next step(s) by providing them with either written or verbal instructions. Make sure your checkout staff goes over the clinical summary with a patient, and that any special instructions or follow-up action is clearly understood by the patient.

Another best practice is for physicians to introduce the staff member who will be dealing the patient at the check-out counter. This helps in creating an immediate connection and helps building trust in the team. Train and instruct your staff to be helpful and sincere when dealing with patients. Little things such as the tone in which your staff speaks, or eye contact, and pleasant attitude can go a long way in maintaining the positive impression a patient has of your healthcare practice brand.

Focus on Reducing Wait Time and Patient Comfort

Long lines at check-out can easily switch brand impressions even for patients who are otherwise happy with your service. Identify bottle-neck and work towards streamlining patient flow to the check-out and billing area. Automated services and use of advanced EHR technology can help both you and your staff improve patient experience and reduce wait times. Try and work out follow-up appointment schedules according to patient convenience as much as possible. Single mothers and/or working mothers and senior citizens in particular will appreciate your office if you can provide them with flexible and convenient scheduling.

Improve your Internal Systems

Follow-up visits with a healthcare provider and prescription refills are again opportunities for building brand impressions. Work on scheduling follow-up visits based on patient and the physician convenience. Make sure patients are not unduly inconvenienced when they call in for a prescription refill. Optimizing patient experience is an ongoing process so make sure you conduct regular process audits for improving patient flow.

Ask for Feedback

Patient service surveys can help you better understand patient difficulties and to identify what is working and what needs to be rectified immediately. Gamify surveys to encourage participation. Offer a gift card, movie tickets, or a discount coupon(s) to survey participants and let them know they stand a chance to win the goodies even if they provide negative feedback. Remember, negative feedbacks are opportunities to improve.

Conclusion

Long wait times, shorter consultations, and haphazard patient movement at the doctor's office can easily put off a patient. Your patients expect to be treated well right from the moment that they make an appointment till the moment they walk out of your office. The best way to deliver on their expectation is by optimizing patient movement so patients can easily find their destinations, meet with their healthcare provider, get consulted, and leave your office without having to unnecessarily move between different counters or service areas, and without experiencing long wait times.

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