Seven Steps to Advanced Access and Efficiency

1. Calculate your supply, demand, and delay

Record the number of available appointment slots for every work day during a sample week (supply). Work towards understanding supply on a daily, weekly, and annual basis.

Record every request for an appointment that comes in during a sample week. Every request for an appointment counts as a demand for a provider's time. Demand can be generated internally by the provider or externally by the patient.

Track and display the delay for your practice, measured as the third next available (TNA) appointment.

2. Calculate your backlog (good and bad)

Good backlog - resulting from patients who choose to be seen in the future because it better fits their schedules or because appointment timing is driven by physiology (e.g., pre-natal appointment).

Bad backlog - resulting from patients who would like to be seen the same day but whose appointments are pushed forward due to a full schedule.

3. Work-down the bad backlog

Develop a backlog reduction plan. Strategies include working down your current bad backlog by working smarter, harder or with temporary resources; reducing demand for visits by doing today's work today, extending visit intervals, promoting continuity, and reducing no-shows; and increasing supply by maximize schedules, optimizing the team, managing constraint, developing care delivery models, using group visits and technology, and encouraging patient self-management.

4. Reduce scheduling complexity

Gain time throughout the day by simplifying your schedule and allocating time efficiently. Strategies include elimination of urgent vs routine appointments, distinguishing short vs long appointments, realistic appointment scheduling, and understanding weekly ebbs and flows.

5. Develop contingency plans

Contingency plans help you to proactively manage changes in patient demand or provider supply to meet the patient needs in the practice. The unexpected is often predictable (e.g., flu season). Strategies include freeze/unfreeze, daily huddles, time away processes, multi-skilled team, managing demand variance, addressing seasonal fluctuations, and anticipating unusual but expected events.

6. Measure cycle time

When patient flow through the office is measured and understood, gaps of wasted non-appointment time that a patient spends in the office are revealed. Once you understand where these gaps are, you can introduce efficiencies to eliminate them and make each visit run more smoothly.

7. Reduce cycle time

Eliminate wasted time in the daily schedule to reduce your cycle time. Strategies include balancing supply and demand of non-appointment work; synchronizing patient, provider, information, room and equipment; anticipating and predicting patient needs; optimizing rooms, staff and equipment; managing constraints; eliminating waste; and tracking progress.

Questions can be directed to PHCQuality@nshealth.ca. *May 2020.*