

Third Next Available Appointment

1. Why and How to Measure

Eliminating the delay for an appointment in your practice is key to having the ability to provide same day access to your patients. The third next available (TNA) appointment is a measure of the delay your patients experience in accessing providers for a scheduled appointment. The TNA is considered a more accurate system measure of access than the “next available” appointment since the next or even the second next available appointment may have become available due to a cancellation or other event that is not predictable or reliable. For access to be a permanent system property, TNA should be zero to one day, with few exceptions. When there are more part-time versus full-time providers, TNA typically is going to exceed zero to one days. For providers who work part time at less than 0.6 FTE, you begin to have to choose between access and continuity for patients because you cannot offer both—unless you have a provider team that is constructed to provide an FTE over a full week.

2. Why TNA is Important

High TNA indicates a clogged and backlogged system which typically results in:

- Poor access and continuity.
- Delay in care for patients, requiring them to wait for care they may need now.
- High no-show rates.
- High walk-in/drop-in rates.

It is a good single indicator of the successful balance between capacity and demand in the system.

Knowing that the TNA is high in your health center can help you to focus on ways to reduce demand and optimize capacity using some or all of the following tactics:

- Extending re-visit intervals and having the patient call for their next appointment versus pre-scheduling an appointment.
- Using new methods/technology for meeting patient needs (e.g., phone, email, patient portal).
- Creating alternative processes to face-to-face visits with a provider for some services and needs (e.g., forms, blood work, test results, pharmacy refills, referrals).
- Reviewing the schedule to remove unnecessary visits.
- Using the patient care team as fully as possible for specific services and follow-up.

3. How to Measure TNA

The TNA should be measured regularly for each provider. As you start out, the TNA should be measured once a week to get an accurate picture of access and of your progress as you work to reduce the TNA. This more frequent measure gives you information you need to assess the impact on the backlog of the changes you are making. Once the TNA has become stable at the targeted zero to one days, it can be monitored monthly. Select one team member with access to the scheduling system to run the TNA measure. Choose the same day of the week and the same time of day to measure each time. To determine the TNA, look at schedule and ask: “As of right now, what is the third next available appointment for this provider?”

A simple rule: Count all calendar days including days off, weekends, and holidays as it makes it easier to compare patient wait time across providers and, most importantly, throughout the practice. This makes TNA a patient-focused measure. **Do not count as open any visit type that is not available for general scheduling use or that are held for use on a particular day. This includes appointments held for same-day appointments or those that might be held for urgent care or walk-in patients.**

4. How to Record TNA

Below is one method to collect TNA. Examine the schedule:

Schedule								
Provider: Dr. Smith								
Time of day	Mon (4th)	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon (11th)
9:00-9:15	Booked	Urgent	Urgent	Urgent	Booked	n/a	n/a	Booked
9:15-9:30	Booked	Urgent	Urgent	Urgent	Booked	n/a	n/a	Booked
9:30-9:45	Booked	Urgent	Urgent	Urgent	Booked	n/a	n/a	Available
9:45-10:00	Booked	Booked	Booked	Available	Booked	n/a	n/a	Booked
10:00-10:15	Urgent	Booked	Booked	Booked	Booked	n/a	n/a	Urgent
10:15-10:30	Urgent	Booked	Booked	Booked	Urgent	n/a	n/a	Urgent
10:30-10:45	Urgent	Booked	Booked	Booked	Urgent	n/a	n/a	Urgent
10:45-11:00	Urgent	Booked	Booked	Booked	Urgent	n/a	n/a	Urgent
11:00-11:15	Booked	Booked	Booked	Booked	Urgent	n/a	n/a	Available
11:15-11:30	Booked	Booked	Booked	Booked	Urgent	n/a	n/a	Available
11:30-11:45	Booked	Booked	Booked	Booked	Urgent	n/a	n/a	Booked
11:45-12:00	Available	Booked	Booked	Booked	Urgent	n/a	n/a	Available
Third Next Available:		Monday the 11th at 9:30						

Record the number of days to the third appointment. Note the date of the third next available appointment. Today is day zero; tomorrow is day one, and so forth. For example, if there are three appointments available today, the TNA is zero. If the third next available is tomorrow, the TNA is one; the day after that the TNA is two.

Count of days to 3rd next

Reporting date	Physician			
	Dr. Smith	NP Andrews	Dr. Morgan	Dr. Jones
04-Mar-19	7			
11-Mar-19				
18-Mar-19				
25-Mar-19				
01-Apr-19				

Third Next Available Appointment Tracker

Provider:

Date:
3 rd Next Available Appt.