

CPC Practice Spotlight 69

Comprehensive Primary Care is an initiative of the Center for Medicare & Medicaid Innovation

Simple, Web-based Enhancement Shows Appointment Wait Times: Less Patient and Provider Frustration Alike

Meetinghouse Family Physicians, Marlton, New Jersey; independent; 3 physicians; 7,500 patients

Situation: As one of the first physicians in south New Jersey to work on PCMH, **Sloan Robinson, MD**, has a reputation with his patients for being an early adopter of technology. During his daughter's recent pregnancy, he heard time and time again about how she waited two and three hours for routine office visits with her obstetrician. Dr. Robinson's exasperated daughter challenged him to find a way to alert patients to longer wait times so they could plan accordingly.

Innovation: For a real-time status of wait times, Dr. Robinson's patients can check his physician page at the practice web site, www.MeetinghouseFamilyPhysicians.com (see screenshot at right), to learn current wait time. If Dr. Robinson's schedule is running behind, patients know they can run another errand or leave their homes a little later to spend less time in the waiting room.

Patient friendly—Any patient can navigate to his webpage to locate the appointment status announcement. Because it is not tied to a specific patient appointment or record, no additional security features (registrations, log-ins or firewall) are needed.

When patients check in for their appointment, they are given a one-page tip sheet about the appointment status feature. The tip sheet shows them how to locate Dr. Robinson's page and then encourages them to check the status from home or their phones before future appointments so they spend less time in the waiting room.

Quick and easy to manage—"If I can do it, anyone can do it," is Dr. Robinson's mantra. Both he and his staff have access to the website to make updates as needed during the work day. They use a small tablet (Apple iPad) to log on to the website as an administrator and then select Dr. Robinson's personal physician page to edit the "current status" of appointment times. They first choose one option from a list of times (on time, 15 minutes late, 30 minutes late or one hour late), and then select the time of day (morning, afternoon or evening). If Dr. Robinson is out of the office, they choose "nothing to display" and the status will not appear. Once the selections are saved, the page updates within a few minutes.

Less expensive than you think—The practice website runs on WordPress, a popular open-source content management system. Open source means the programming language is publicly available, which allows programmers everywhere to share low-cost coding features that expand functionality called plug-ins. The site designer located an existing plug-in for an appointment status feature and added it to the site.

After four weeks of testing the functionality and ease of use, the feature went live. At first, Dr. Robinson held formal updates with the front desk to maintain status, but they have found a more casual check-in process works just as effectively. It's been available to patients since February. Dr. Robinson estimates after three to six months of informing patients of the new feature, the practice will have a better sense of its usefulness and effectiveness.

Unexpected benefits—While communicating to patients is the status update's primary function, Dr. Robinson says making the updates also has helped him be mindful of his time throughout the day. When his schedule runs on time, he says he feels less stressed and more able to enjoy seeing his patients. From his patients' anecdotal comments, he feels his patients also appreciate his practice's focus on patient experience by respecting their time.

What's next: The quick success of the appointment status feature has Dr. Robinson contemplating other ways to keep his schedule on track that would best benefit patients. He would like to explore new ways to design his schedule so he can maximize his effectiveness and improve every patient experience.



Dr. Robinson's wait time ticker appears in the upper right corner of his physician web page, which is visible without a log in or registration. He updates the ticker with a few taps on a tablet. This stand-alone feature is not integrated with the practice EHR, meaning security and privacy issues are not a concern.

April 15, 2016

CPC Change Driver 1: Comprehensive Primary Care Functions

- 1.4: Patient and Caregiver Engagement

For more information about the CPC initiative, visit <http://innovation.cms.gov/initiatives/Comprehensive-Primary-Care-Initiative/>.



This material was prepared by TMF Health Quality Institute under contract with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Any statements expressed by the individual and resources cited in this publication are not an opinion of, nor endorsement by, TMF or CMS.