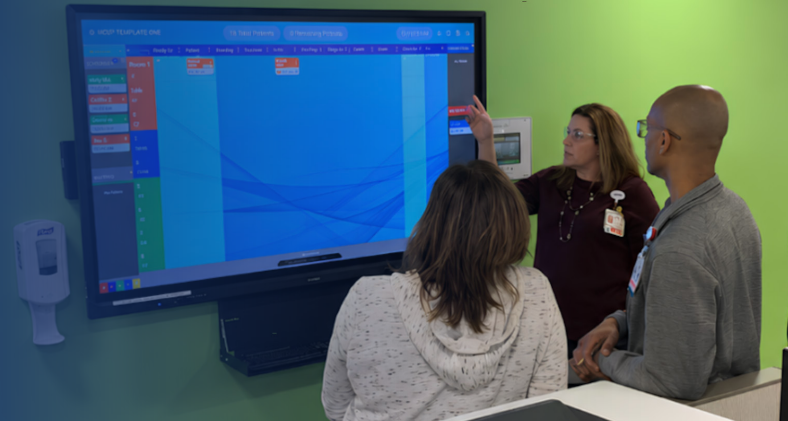


Making the Patient Journey **VISIBLE**



The Missing Layer in Ambulatory Care Operations

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Introduction

Ambulatory care environments are under increasing pressure to improve access, enhance patient experience, and maintain workforce sustainability. While significant attention has been directed toward clinical quality and service excellence, comparatively less focus has been placed on the operational conditions that shape the patient's experience during a visit.

Patients do not encounter care as a set of discrete clinical interactions; rather, they experience a continuous sequence of events characterized by transitions, delays, and interpersonal exchanges with clinic staff and their provider. These elements—often considered operational rather than clinical—play a decisive role in shaping perceptions of quality, trust, and satisfaction.

This article builds upon prior work examining real-time patient tracking in ambulatory settings and extends the analysis by reframing these operational interventions through the lens of patient experience. Specifically, we focus on three domains that are consistently salient to patients: timeliness, personalization, and coordination.

The Operational Determinants of Patient Experience

In many ambulatory clinics, the coordination of patient flow remains largely opaque. As care teams frequently rely on fragmented communication mechanisms—including electronic medical record (EMR) indicators, verbal updates, physical flags or other markers, and ad hoc status checks—to determine patient location and readiness for the next step in care.

Although these processes may suffice under low-demand conditions, they are prone to breakdown in more complex or time-constrained environments. The resulting inefficiencies manifest as:

- › Prolonged and unpredictable wait times
- › Redundant or repetitive patient interactions
- › Delayed or unclear transitions between stages of care
- › Increased cognitive and coordination burden on staff

From the patient's perspective, these operational gaps are not perceived as technical limitations but as deficiencies in care delivery. Patients may interpret delays as neglect, disorganization, or lack of attentiveness, even when clinical care itself remains of high quality.

Real-Time Visibility as an Enabler of Patient-Centered Care

Interventions that improve patient experience must therefore address the underlying operational structure of the clinic. One such intervention is the implementation of a shared, real-time patient tracking system that provides a unified view of clinic activity.

Digital tracking platforms, such as eSynchrony, build upon the traditional whiteboard approach used by some clinics to track patient flow alongside EMR workstations. These digital boards capture patient status, location, and



progression through visit stages in real time while making this information visible to the entire care team across multiple devices. Large displays serve as highly visible, HIPAA compliant communication hubs within the clinic, helping keep teams aligned as staff and providers move between exam rooms and workstations throughout the clinic session. This transparency within the clinic's day-to-day operations also create a sense of purpose and accountability among the staff that help them achieve their primary goal: To move patients to the next stage of their appointment quickly and efficiently, thereby increasing the patient's overall satisfaction with their clinic experience.

Although these systems are often introduced to improve efficiency and throughput, their impact on patient experience is substantial. Three dimensions are particularly noteworthy.

Timeliness and the Reduction of Wait Times

Timeliness is a central determinant of patient satisfaction. In the absence of real-time visibility, care teams often lack awareness of who is with a patient, how long they have been there, or whether unexpected issues are occurring, allowing delays to accumulate unnoticed and making patient prioritization more difficult. Without timely information on patient status and workflow progression, physicians are limited in their ability to dynamically adjust and decide which patient to see next to manage overall wait times across the clinic session.

Respecting a patient's wait time begins the moment they arrive. Making the wait times visible to the entire care team – from the lobby through every stage of the visit – creates shared accountability and allows delays to be recognized before they become patient frustrations. Digital platforms like eSynchrony can display a waiting patient in the lobby, along with a timer and an alarm on large displays for everyone in the care team to acknowledge and respond.

Empirical observations from an orthopedic fracture clinic demonstrate that implementation of a tracking system was associated with a reduction in patient wait times of approximately 25%–50%, accompanied by a 25% increase in patient satisfaction scores.

From an experiential standpoint, these improvements translate into more than shorter waits. They contribute to:

- › Greater predictability of visit duration
- › Reduced anxiety
- › Enhanced perception that the clinic values the patient's time

Importantly, real-time visibility allows care teams to identify and address delays proactively, thereby preventing deterioration in the patient experience before it becomes apparent.

Personalization Through Shared Situational Awareness

Personalization in healthcare is often discussed in the context of clinical decision-making; however, it is equally relevant to operational interactions. Patients are highly sensitive to whether their care feels coordinated and personalized or fragmented and impersonal.

In environments lacking shared situational awareness, patients may encounter repetitive questioning, inconsistent communication, and a perceived lack of preparedness among staff.

Add Patient		CHECK IN		READY FOR RN/PA/RES
SCHEDULED		Metrics		
No Patients		Avg Wait Time		0:00
MAIN LOBBY	ROOM 1 DR. SMITH			
	ROOM 2 DR. SMITH			
	ROOM 3 DR. SMITH			
	ROOM 4 DR. SMITH			
	ROOM 5 DR. SMITH			
	ROOM 6 DR. SMITH			
	ROOM 7 TESTING			
Kareem M 3:00 PM 10:08				

Figure 2. On digital patient tracking board, such as eSynchrony pictured here, time thresholds can be set per stage of the patient's appointment. When a patient has spent more time in a particular stage of their appointment, an alarm will go off on the card, prompting action by clinic staff or providers.

By contrast, when care teams operate from a shared, real-time understanding of patient status, each interaction can be informed by prior steps in the visit. Digital tracking platforms facilitate this alignment by ensuring that all team members have access to the same information regarding patient progress and needs.

The resulting experience is one in which patients perceive that:

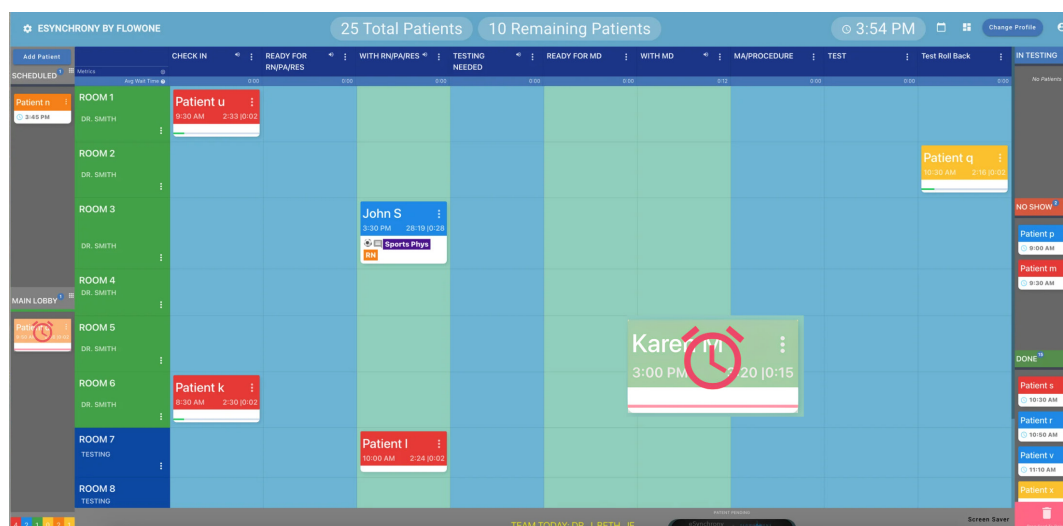
- › Staff are informed and prepared
- › Transitions between roles are intentional
- › Care delivery is organized around their individual visit
- › Patients get more face time with their provider without negatively impacting other waiting patients

Such perceptions are central to the broader construct of patient-centered care. One of the ways a digital platform can enable that is by using labels or emoji on HIPAA compliant patient tiles to indicate who has already seen the patient, are there any special needs, are there tests just completed, are there any social determinants that the provider should be aware of.

Coordination and the Perception of Seamless Care

Coordination is a defining feature of high-quality ambulatory care, yet it is often difficult to achieve in practice. Fragmented workflows can lead to inefficiencies such as idle time in exam rooms, delayed handoffs, and uneven pacing across visit stages.

Figure 4: Tracking boards, like eSynchrony, provide complete transparency to the status of every patient in the clinic. Shown here, the eSynchrony board and a patient card showing an alarm because the expected time for the stage in the appointment has expired.



Digital tracking systems address these challenges by making workflow dependencies explicit and enabling synchronized action across roles. Clinics that have implemented such systems report improved communication, stronger teamwork, and more consistent execution of care processes.

Staff can step out of an exam room and instantly see the status of the entire clinic, communicate patient readiness with a simple drag-and-drop action rather than chasing physicians or leaving notes, and remain focused on patient care. Likewise, physicians can communicate next steps to staff just as easily, creating a shared awareness of clinic activity without the constant need for verbal updates, door-knocking, or searching for one another.

Patient hand-off between clinic staff become streamlined and nearly effortless as next steps for any patient are on the

board. Across many clinics, these seemingly small logistical efficiencies add up, often reclaiming nearly one hour out of every four previously spent coordinating, locating, checking, and communicating rather than caring for patients. When the board “just works,” staff recognize the benefits while having a central, “at a glance” view of all patient statuses at any given time.

For patients, these operational improvements are experienced as:

- › Smooth progression from check-in to checkout
- › Minimal interruptions or unnecessary delays
- › A sense that the care team is working cohesively

This perception of seamlessness is a key contributor to overall satisfaction and trust in the care delivery system.

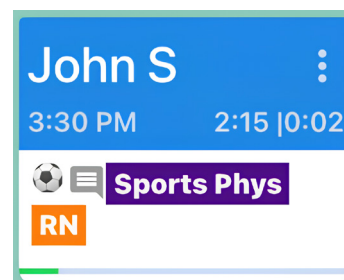


Figure 3: This is a view of a patient card on the eSynchrony digital patient tracking board. Notice the labels and the emoji applied to the card. These can be customized to represent clinic staff members, specific procedures needed or even the patient's mood.

Interpreting Operational Metrics Through the Patient Lens

Operational performance metrics are often used to evaluate efficiency, but their relevance extends directly to patient experience. In one field case study implementing the eSynchrony digital tracking board, the following improvements were realized:

- › Reduction in wait times (25%–50%)
- › Increase in patient satisfaction scores (+25%)
- › Expansion of new patient capacity
 - Most new capacity is due to room utilization metrics captured by the digital tracking board. When space is used efficiently and consistently, the ability to provide quality care to patients while increasing the number of patients seen per day becomes a reality
- › Elimination or large reduction of staff overtime

While these outcomes are operational in nature, their experiential implications are significant. Reduced wait times and increased capacity improve access to care; elimination of overtime, which contributes to less burnout and promotes staff well-being, directly influences the quality of patient interactions. Thus, operational and experiential outcomes should not be considered distinct domains but rather interconnected dimensions of care delivery.

Implications for Ambulatory Care Leadership

For ambulatory care leaders, efforts to improve patient experience are often focused on service training, communication strategies, or environmental enhancements. While these interventions are valuable, they may not address the underlying operational factors that shape the patient journey.

The findings discussed in this article suggest that patient experience is, to a considerable extent, a function of workflow design and execution. Accordingly, leaders should consider the following approaches:

- › Implement systems that provide a shared, at-a-glance view of the patient visit.
- › Capture and share time-based data to identify operational inefficiencies.
- › Use empirical findings to inform scheduling, staffing, and capacity planning.



Figure 5: An ambulatory clinic staff showing their achievement certificate for top patient experience scores after implementing eSynchrony.

It is important to distinguish operational visibility systems from electronic medical records (EMRs). EMRs are designed primarily to document clinical care, whereas operational visibility systems are designed to communicate and coordinate patient flow as care is being delivered. By making patient status visible to the entire care team in a shared, at-a-glance format, these systems reduce the need for hallway conversations, repeated status checks, and delays in communication, enabling teams to respond more efficiently to changing clinic conditions.

A critical factor in the success of any digital tracking board is its simplicity and intuitiveness. If clinic staff must actively manage the board throughout the day, it simply becomes another task added to an already demanding workload. Successful systems are adopted quickly because they reduce—not increase—the logistical work required to coordinate patient care.

These strategies align operational performance with patient-centered objectives and establish a foundation for continuous improvement.

Conclusion

The patient experience in ambulatory care is not solely determined by clinical outcomes or interpersonal interactions; it is fundamentally shaped by the operational environment in which care is delivered.

Real-time patient tracking systems, such as eSynchrony, enable clinics to transform opaque and fragmented workflows into coordinated, data-driven processes. In doing so, they address key determinants of patient experience, including timeliness, personalization, and coordination.

By reframing operational excellence as a prerequisite for experiential quality, ambulatory care organizations can more effectively design systems that meet the expectations of modern patients. The result is a care experience that is not only clinically effective but also efficient, responsive, and patient-centered from arrival to departure.