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Innovative, cloud-based technology dramatically reduces patient wait times, increases access

Imagine leaving work early, fighting traffic and searching for a parking spot, all with a parent or child, to make it to your provider's appointment on time. You are then greeted by a sign in the waiting room that reads, "Please let us know if you have been waiting more than 20 minutes for your doctor."

As you take a seat, you're frustrated that you made every effort to be on time for your scheduled appointment, but your doctor is already planning to make you wait up to 20 minutes.

Why the wait?

The truth is that doctors do care about their patient's time and want them to have a smooth, efficient visit at their clinic. Long patient wait times, miscommunication about which patient should be seen next or patients getting "lost" as they progress through different stops of their appointment, is stressful for both doctors and the staff.

Doctors have said that one of the worst parts of their job is running behind in clinic because it causes the patient to disengage from the appointment before the doctor even sees them. Doctors then spend a lot of energy and time apologizing to the patients and reengaging them in the appointment.

Long patient wait times are also frustrating for staff. Having staff members who end up working overtime, skipping lunches and dealing with unhappy patients leads to low morale, staff burnout and high turnover.

But the ability for most clinics to reduce patient wait time remains elusive because:

- There is poor communication, which causes confusion behind the scenes between staff and doctors.
- It is sometimes unclear to the doctor which patient is ready and should be seen next.
- Communication between staff can be disjointed due to being in and out of exam rooms.
- Patients aren't ready for the doctors when the doctors are ready to see them.
- No system exists for staff and providers to communicate to each other when help is needed.
- Staff is distracted by patients who ask how long it will be until they see the doctor.
- Doctors waste time apologizing to patients after they have had a long wait time.
- Little objective, unbiased data exists to understand how to improve clinic workflow problems.
- Clinics run in a reactionary or traditional "we've always done it this way" mode.

As a result, some doctors feel running their clinics is similar to driving through an unfamiliar city without a GPS. They eventually get to their destination, but it takes much longer than they would like and includes a lot of roadblocks that potentially could have been avoided.

An innovative solution

Many doctors find that using eSynchrony, a HIPAA-compliant lean software, is like adding a GPS to their practice. With this visual communication tool, doctors, staff and technicians in a fast-paced clinic can

nonverbally track patients by visually moving them through the steps of the process as they are being treated on a central screen. The large touch screen is located in a common area and is simultaneously accessible on desktop computers in other areas.

The software visually shows on a monitor where patients are currently located and exactly how long they have been in each step of the appointment process. If a backup in patient flow is forming, resources can be allocated immediately to alleviate the bottleneck.

"The best feature about the eSynchrony board is that at one glance, I know whether my clinic is running on time, which patients waiting for me and where my staff members are," said **Dr. Yasmin Bradfield of UW Health | UW Hospital and Clinics | Madison, WI,** "One glance gives me a snapshot of my entire clinic in live time."

This information helps her to troubleshoot in real time.

"I can immediately see which patients are waiting for me and rearrange the sequence of patients, so I can see those who have been waiting the longest or who will have shorter appointments sooner," Bradfield explained. "Doing this helps our overall clinic to run more efficiently and helps me to provide solutions for delays and potential areas of patient dissatisfaction. Using eSynchrony improves the patient experience in our clinic, which is the bottom line for us."

Builds teamwork

The eSynchrony board improves teamwork in clinics because it allows everyone to help improve the patient experience throughout the clinic.

"The eSynchrony board forces us all to think about what the other people are doing and how it is affecting the whole patient experience," **Kristin Anderson, orthoptist at UW Health**, said. "Before, we only focused on finishing our own responsibilities. Once we handed patients off, we moved on.

"The clinic wasn't run cohesively because there wasn't a lot of continuity from one role to the next," Anderson continued. "Now, we can see everything that is going on in the clinic, and we are better able to communicate and work together as a team to help each other out to improve clinic flow, reduce delays and improve the patients' overall experience."

Added patient appointments

"Implementing eSynchrony is extremely helpful if there are multiple steps in the patient's journey through their clinical appointment," **Dr. Kimberly Stepien of UW Health** said. "Using the board helps to create a team approach in the clinic toward patient care because everyone knows the status of the clinic and can help where needed, which reduces patient wait time."

Streamlining patient flow has allowed her to add clients to her clinics.

"For example, we used to struggle to see 17 people in a half day, but now I can comfortably see 20 people in a half day, and our patient satisfaction has gone up," Stepien added.

At an orthopedic center at Children's Hospital of Wisconsin, eSynchrony is helping them to meet one of their strategic initiatives of seeing more fracture patients on the same day that they call the office for an appointment.
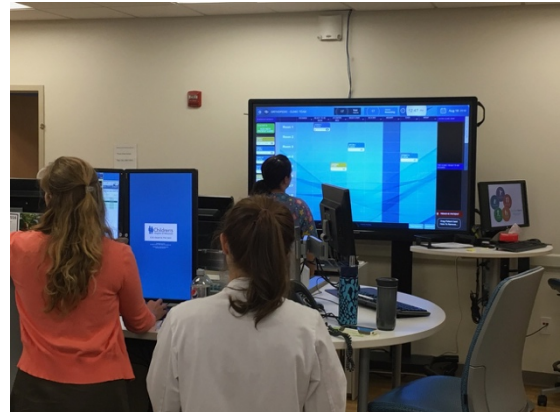
"In orthopedics, we get phone calls to add patients on to our schedule," **Terry Schwartz, orthopedic program administrator at Children's Wisconsin | Milwaukee, WI,** said. "For example, if there is a patient who has a fracture, we can look at the board and easily see immediately if we can add another patient to the schedule that day."

Increased patient satisfaction

"I have been with Dr. Bradfield for 16 years, and the eSynchrony board has been the most helpful thing that we have incorporated into the practice in terms of time and patient management," said **Darla Coullard, ophthalmic assistant and office coordinator.** "Before the board, we had no way of tracking how long our patients were waiting in each step of their patient visit."

The board helped them to discover where wasted time occurs for patients and eliminate it. This has allowed them to make patient appointments more efficient, which has improved patient satisfaction.

"Our patient satisfaction has gone up dramatically," Coullard said. "We are now consistently getting 9s and 10s on our patient exit surveys on a 10-point scale. The board is helping us to take better care of our patients and reduce their wait times. "

It used to take two or three hours for a routine eye exam. Now it only takes 90 minutes. Follow-up exams that used to take 90 minutes are down to 30 minutes.

The number of patients a provider can see in a clinic also has increased. Before, the doctor was seeing 26 patients per clinic, and now she is seeing 30 patients, while maintaining the quality of the appointments and increasing patient satisfaction.

Problems solved with real-time data

The data that is collected for every clinic also allows doctors and staff to review the patient experience and identify opportunities for continuous process improvement.

"From an administrative standpoint, I like to look at the data at the end of the day to see where our wait times were and how can we improve them," **Gary Lukes, ophthalmology supervisor at UW Health**, said. "By brainstorming how to reduce wait times, we should be able to see more patients in the future. This is important to our patients because our specialists are booked three months out and comprehensives are booked almost a year out."

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Terri L. Young, MD, MBA, chair for the Department Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences, also uses the patient data to improve clinic processes.

"Using the real-time data that is collected allows us to use the metrics to analyze where the bottlenecks are and determine how prevent them, eliminate waste in the system for patients and improve the patient's overall experience," Dr. Terri Young said.

Schwartz has also found the data to be useful in her practice. Her frontline staff are now solving problems and coming to the table with solutions by using the data.

"The staff is now problem solving and proposing changes," Schwartz said. "It gives everyone ownership and an equal part in the process, and it creates a sense of: 'What can I do to help?'"

Increased morale

"Prior to eSynchrony, there was a sense of hopelessness among employees due to the business of the clinic," said **Michelle Chizek, director of business services at UW Health**. "Additionally, the clinic flow was inefficient, and patient wait times were long. There has been a marked improvement since the eSynchrony boards were adopted."

The eSynchrony board has had a positive impact on staff morale because it has improved communication between technicians and physicians.

"Employee morale has improved because there is more transparency and a team approach to patient care is now the norm," Chizek explained. "The eSynchrony board has made it evident that if they all work together, they will have a better outcome for the patient."

Lukes said that the staff, doctors, orthoptists and technicians used to work in isolated silos.

"Now they are a tight-knit group that works together," Lukes continued, "and the eSynchrony board plays a huge role in that by bringing the focus back to the patient and how they can help each other to better meet the needs of the patient."