

WHITE PAPER

Waiting or Winning?

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Across the country, patients are waiting excessive amounts of time for appointments with their providers. In a time when patients can order almost anything quickly and efficiently online, the lack of access to their provider is especially troubling, and many wonder why healthcare hasn't kept up with other consumer-based services. As healthcare leaders, we realize the complexity of the issue, but it remains imperative that we meet patients' expectations and needs.

A robust patient access strategy can foster patient loyalty, and drive growth for your organization. But what does a successful patient access strategy entail?

This white paper explores key components, such as provider partnerships, standardized processes, and patient-centric models, to help your organization overcome access challenges.

Transitioning to a Patient-Centric Model

The era of the traditional provider-centric model is giving way to patient-centered care. Adapting to this shift requires cultural transformation within organizations.

Establishing a Shared Vision

Access work is not just a shift in scheduling processes. It is also a transformational change in an organization's culture. Do not underestimate the change management principles needed to be successful.

Leaders must define and communicate a clear vision for the patient-centered approach. This vision should address:

- The need to prioritize patients' convenience and outcomes
- The role of providers and staff in delivering this experience

Providers should be engaged in the process and given the opportunity to guide schedule changes and the needs of their patients. Scheduling staff are crucial and will help drive the outcome, so don't forget them in the process. Ensure the goals are clear and communicated often. If a cultural change can be realized, productivity gains and improved patient access will be a byproduct within a more sustainable model.

The Role of Providers in Improving Patient Access

Providers as Key Partners

Providers are vital allies in improving access, and you cannot successfully tackle this issue without their partnership. First, identify physician/advanced practice provider (APP) champions. Select leaders who are visionary, can adapt to change, are respected among their peers, and are committed to put in the work.

Creating Efficient APP Care Models

According to data from the *AMGA 2024 Medical Clinic Staffing Survey Report*, 45.9% of providers in system-affiliated medical groups are APPs. Yet, many systems lack efficient care models to realize the benefits APPs

can yield. Variability in care models, lack of trust, competition with supervising physicians for work RVUs (wRVUs), and many other factors contribute to maintaining the inefficient use of APPs.

Here's how organizations can better integrate APPs into their patient access strategy:

- **Define Roles Clearly:** Establish who will see each visit type, based on the patient's clinical needs. Ensure new patient visits are carefully reviewed, as restrictive scheduling protocols can create significant delays in delivering patient care.
- **Streamline Care Models:** How many potential visits could you gain by reducing duplication in provider efforts? Do the math to understand the impact of duplicative care models when everyone sees the same patients.
- **Engage in Dialogue:** Work collaboratively with providers to understand the barriers and how the organization can achieve a more efficient model together.

Key Strategies to Enhance Patient Access

Standardizing Scheduling Templates

Standardizing scheduling templates is the heavy lift of access work, but it will pay exponential dividends. Provider templates drive key success factors like how many patients you will see and what your new patient rate will be. However, there is often misalignment between templates and the broader goals of the organization.

One of the challenges we find when working with medical groups is that their contractual expectations do not clearly define what it means to be full-time, how that translates into patient contact hours, and how schedule templates are designed to support this definition and goal. Creating standards is important because it improves the efficiency of the scheduling staff so they don't have to remember the "special" rules for each physician or APP.

Setting Goals and Tracking Performance

To drive improvement in patient access, goals must be clear, measurable, and consistently monitored. Benchmarking serves as an effective tool to ensure performance remains competitive. Drawing from AMGA Consulting's survey data, median benchmarks for Primary Care have been provided in the following table. Goals should be set for each metric and can be tracked by absolute performance and/or a percentage meeting the goal. Key performance indicators (KPIs) to track include:

Metric	Primary Care Medians
Average visits per provider, per day	Median visits per provider are 16 per day <i>*This represents a blended physician/APP rate</i>
Productivity percentile per provider based on wRVUs	Internal Medicine Median wRVUs 6,056 Family Medicine Median wRVUs 6,165
Contact hours per 1.0 provider FTE	Median is 36 contact hours per week for a 1.0
Third next available appointment for new patients	Median is 7.7 days
Percent of visits that are new patients	Median Primary Care new patient rate is 6.3% of total visits
Schedule fill rate	Median is 87%
No-show rate	Median is 5.4%

Source: AMGA 2024 Compensation and Productivity and Operations and Finance Surveys (based on 2023 data)

Enhancing the Patient Experience in Scheduling

Provider appointment availability is not enough. The patient experience is just as important of a factor when making an appointment. To ensure a superior experience:

- **Test Schedule Processes:** Secret shop the appointment scheduling line(s) and consider your experience. Is this what you want your community to experience, and if not, what is your ideal state?
- **Explore Centralized Access Centers:** Many organizations find success in centralized, one-phone-number scheduling, but it must be well executed to successfully triage patient needs and meet performance standards.
- **Focus on Usability:** Online scheduling has become an industry standard, so ensure your scheduling platform is intuitive and adaptable to create a consumer-friendly experience.

Building Success with a Patient Access Strategy

To remain competitive and responsive to patients' needs, organizations must prioritize and constantly evolve their patient access strategies. Key takeaways include:

- Build strong partnerships with providers and APP champions.
- Standardize operational processes for efficiency.
- Track key metrics, such as third next available appointments, to evaluate success.
- Create a seamless and patient-friendly scheduling experience.

By committing to these strategies, your organization can enhance patient loyalty, improve access, and drive long-term growth. However, true success lies in the collective dedication of all stakeholders—physicians, APPs, staff, and administration—who must share a unified commitment to prioritizing patient access. This shared focus ensures improved health outcomes and a better overall patient experience.

AMGA Consulting partners with organizations across the nation on their access improvement journeys, offering a strategic framework for benchmarking and driving meaningful change. Are you ready to transform your patient access strategy? Contact us today to learn how we can help your organization achieve these goals. ▲



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