Using Communication through Technology to Reduce Wait Time in Ambulatory Care

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Introduction

According to the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in 2016, there were an estimated 883.7 million outpatient physician visits with outpatient usage expected to continue to increase. Ambulatory wait times can affect patient experience and resource utilization. Prolonged wait times in ambulatory setting influences, a significant Wait time splay a significant role in managing healthcare and resource utilization. component of healthcare, can affect the future usage of services as shown in studies such as Wang et al. (2018), who found in an observational study of 13k veterans, those who had to wait a significant amount of time to be seen, sought future treatment at other health facilities

Background

This project examined and analyzed the use of a health information technology (HIT) application on wait times in an ambulatory setting of a large comprehensive cancer care center. The HIT application used established technological systems to improve inter team communication in a subgroup of surgical specialist which identified location and processes of team members.
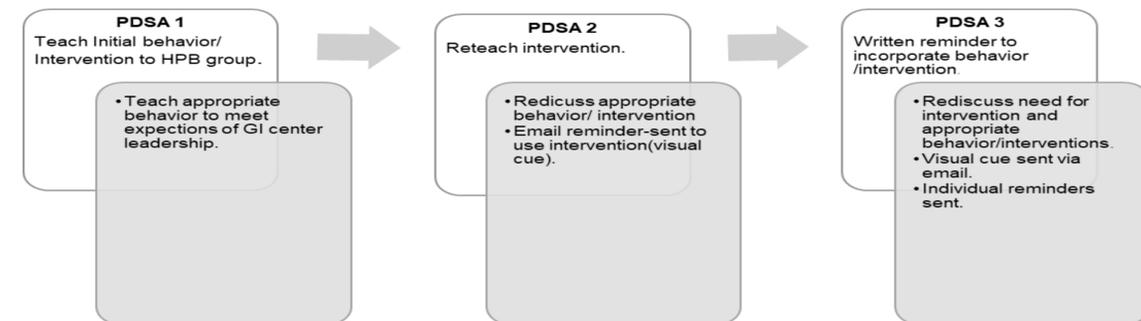
Objectives

Primary objective:
Reduce wait time (in –room wait time) to < 20 minutes.
Secondary Objective:
Improve patient satisfaction

Methods

IRB exempt- No patient identifiers were collected

Participants: 7 HPB multidisciplinary teams in surgical care center.

Method employed below:

PDSA 1
Teach Initial behavior/ Intervention to HPB group.
• Teach appropriate behavior to meet expectations of GI center leadership.

PDSA 2
Reteach intervention.
• Redicuss appropriate behavior/ intervention
• Email reminder-sent to use intervention(visual cue).

PDSA 3
Written reminder to incorporate behavior /intervention.
• Rediscuss need for intervention and appropriate behavior/interventions.
• Visual cue sent via email.
• Individual reminders sent.

Measures and Analysis

Measures

• Percentage of use of application by participants were measures with each PDSA cycle.

• Wait times were measures for the time patient spent waiting to see the physician.

• Patient satisfaction was obtained to note if improvements can be correlated with decrease wait time.

Analysis of patient wait times and satisfaction scores post PDSA interventions were measured during project implementation.
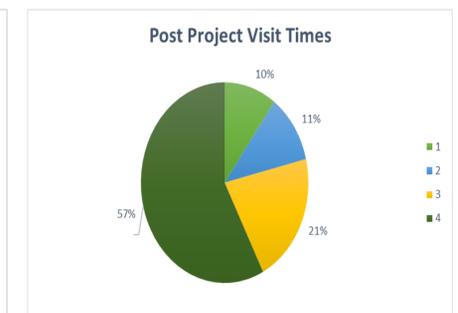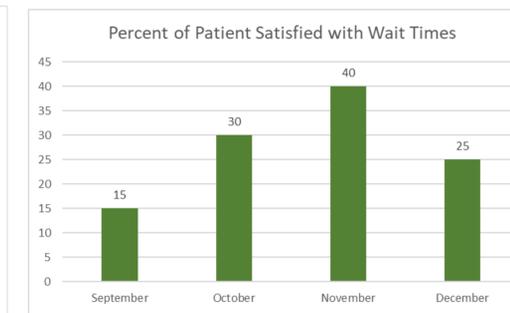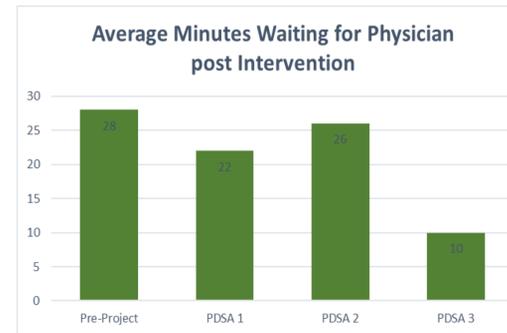
Results

• Significant improvement in the average wait time was made post interventions.
• Average wait times were reduced by 6, 2, and 18 minutes, respectively.
• Patient satisfaction improved by 15, 25, and 10 percent, respectively.
• Post project visit times- Majority visit wait times are between 30-40 minutes.
• Findings correspond with similar studies such Plourde et al.(2020) which showed improved wait times improve patient satisfaction.

Discussion

• By implementing a small change in communication, a reduction in wait times showed a corresponding improvement in patient satisfaction.

• Using applications readily available in HIT applications will reduce overall cost of implementing similar quality projects.

• Findings of the project suggest inter-team communication is pertinent to clinic flow and subsequently can affect patient satisfaction.

Significance

• Improving wait times will likely lead to customer retention.

• Employing cost effective measures improved wait times and improved patient satisfaction.

• Improved wait times can reduce overhead cost in ambulatory settings by reducing the need for over time staff.