Time to Reach Out and Touch Them: Timely Telecommunication within the GEM Clinic

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AIM Statement: Our goal is to answer the telephone in the GEM clinic within 30 seconds 75% of the time within 8 weeks without compromising on quality of conversation.
Team Members

**Physician**: Monica Horton, MD

**Lead Clerk**: Roxanne Segura

**Clerks**: Loretta Myles
            Nayda Rodriguez

**Facilitators**:  
Amruta Parekh, MD, MPH  
Wayne Fischer, MS, PhD
Background

- Emphasis on customer satisfaction
- Automatic Call Distribution telephone
- Measured average speed of answering telephone within one business week
- Benchmarks on Dashboard
  - Blue “good” less than 24 seconds
  - Red “poor” more than 24 seconds
- One minute is 40 rings
Performance of GEM Clinic

- Several staff turnovers
- Noted at the Director’s morning meeting that GEM Clinic took longer than one minute to answer telephone
- *Patients and doctors were complaining*
- *Action was needed*
First Steps

- January 9th, met with Roxanne and her supervisor to discuss the performance
- Agreed having two full time PSA to staff front and back office.
- Close the door to reduce noise and interruptions
- Formation of quality improvement team
- 1st Meeting on January 30, 2009
Responses

- “It is the population, they really like to talk.”
- “You will never reach this goal.”
- “Good luck! You have a lot of work to do.”
- “What you are doing is great, but you will never reach your goal.”
- “There are some things that shouldn’t have to be measured.”
Clerk Satisfaction Survey

Survey Questions

- #1 Work Valued by Clinic Staff
- Work Valued by MAS
- Make a Difference in Patient Care
- Converse without interruption
- Answer Questions with Ease and Clarity
- Additional Training
- Standardized Script
- Enjoy Talking

Likert scale scores

Clerk 1
Clerk 2
Clerk 3
Patient Satisfaction Survey

- Completely Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Completely Disagree

Values

Scale:
- Answered in timely manner
- Purpose Answered
- Understood Answer
- Courteous & Easy to understand
- Call again
Interventions

- March 13 Removed forms from work room
- March 13 twice daily reports of average speed of answer
- March 16 signs posted
- March 17 realized not logging on phone first thing in morning
Post-Intervention Flowsheet for Answering Telephone

1. **Clerks**
   - Phone rings
   - 2 clerks **ALWAYS** present
   - Is there a patient at front desk?
   - Front office clerk answers phone
   - What is the nature of the telephone call?
     - Caller requests to cancel appointment; clerk asks about patient's rescheduling appointment
     - Appointment scheduled
     - Phone call terminated
     - Caller requesting consult, lab work or radiographical results, prosthetics or medication request, or acute medical issue. Caller requests to speak to MD
     - Call transferred to nurse
     - Caller requesting assistance with home health or financial needs
     - Call transferred to social worker
   - Is back office clerk available to answer phone?
   - Back office clerk answers phone

2. **Nurses**

3. **Social Workers**
Return on Investment

- Incrementally worked towards our goal
- Increased confidence in their work
- Better rapport with other GEM clinic team members
- Decrease in the number of abandoned calls
- Not only had bull’s eye target removed from the GEM clinic, but received recognition at the Director’s morning meeting
- Continual evaluation of patient and clinician satisfaction
Next Steps: Type of Calls

“Managing the Medication Maze”
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