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Improving satisfaction among established patients in a Midwestern pain clinic

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Background: A problem in many health care practices is deciding the appropriate appointment length for new and established patients. Patients become frustrated when there is inadequate time to have their needs met, yet when a patient's clinic time is spontaneously lengthened; the provider gets behind in schedule, causing delays and greater frustration for others.

Aim: The aims of this evidence based project were to determine whether implementation of a flexible appointment system would improve the current scheduling process in a pain clinic by allowing complex patients the opportunity to schedule a longer clinic appointment and would improve patient satisfaction.

Design: This evidence-based practice innovation followed a program evaluation process using a descriptive, existing survey completed by clinic staff and patients.

Setting: A Midwestern pain clinic caring for patients with acute and chronic pain diagnoses.

Participants: A convenience sample of 120 patients was surveyed before and after the process change. Thirteen staff members completed the survey on SurveyMonkey pre- and post-procedural change at the same intervals, the patients were surveyed.

Results: Patients were more satisfied with the time that they spent in the exam room and the waiting room. The process change improved communication with staff and patients and provided an opportunity to discuss their concerns and health changes prior to their scheduled appointment.

Conclusion: Allowing an option for flexible scheduling in appointment lengths provided an opportunity to meet patient needs, offer improved service, and improve patient-provider communication.

Recommendations: It may be beneficial to assess the level of patient satisfaction with those patients who chose to extend their appointments and compare the level of satisfaction with those patients who did not lengthen their appointments and to evaluate the amount of "no-show" appointments with those who have extended their appointment. Implementing a standardized script for the schedulers may help with appropriate patient appointment lengths and decrease the number of patients' appointments that were lengthened without patients' knowledge.

Biography

Kathy A Baule is an Advanced Practice Nurse who has worked for over 20 years in the area of Critical Care, Neurosurgery and Pain Management. She has presented at American Association of Neuroscience Nursing, Midwestern Pain Society Nursing as well as Midwest Nursing Research Society. Her special interest in patient satisfaction was the drive to recently investigate patient satisfaction in among established patients in a Midwestern pain clinic. After receiving her Doctorate in Nursing Practice from the University of Illinois at Chicago, she is practicing at Indiana University Ball Memorial Hospital as an APN in Trauma and Neurosurgery.

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