Case Study: Improving Access to University Health Services

A Case Study

► Process Improved:
The system for triage and making appointments for students utilizing University Health Services

► Unit(s):
Student Affairs – University Health Services

► Customers of the Process and Their Needs:
UW-Madison students were the users of the process, although the problem impacted R.N. and Program Assistants (PAs) staffing University Health Services

► Problem/Opportunity Statement:
Students were dissatisfied with access to medical services at UHS. Specific complaints included prolonged waiting times on hold or getting the “busy signal” when calling UHS. The limited capacity of the system for incoming calls meant that people waited a long time or were disconnected.

All medical/illness-related questions were referred to one nurse. (When the nurse was on the telephone with a caller, messages were taken from ill students or those seeking same-day appointments. The messages stacked up and often, by the time the nurse was available to call the patient back, the patient would not be available. Many opportunities for contact were missed. Getting an appointment was very much a matter of luck.)

The long waits for the nurse meant that students were “triaged” by PAs who were non-medical personnel. More students came in for care without appointments. (“I couldn’t get through on the phone, so I came in.”)

The decentralized appointment structure meant that a patient calling for a women’s clinic appointment called directly to the clinic. The PAs answering those calls were also responsible for checking in patients, pulling charts, making follow-up appointments and other reception functions. At the same time, another clinic area might no have any calls waiting.

► Changes Made:
The entire process for making appointments and triage was redesigned”
1. Remodeled to create a physical call center area
2. Centralized personnel involved in appointment-making and telephone triage functions
3. Defined roles and expectations of PAs and RNs in the call center
4. Refined the protocol book as a guide for PA and RN staff
5. Reconfigured the Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) system to include deeper queues, modified cascade so callers can select a “general information” prompt and be routed to a Student Health Advocate, etc. See attached flowchart.
6. Increased the RN staff by three to meet the volume of calls
7. Reassigned PAs to meet the projected volume of calls coming in (based on data collected about peak call times)
► Results to Date and Expected:
1. There is a stable number of PA and RN staff in the call center
2. Phone messages are rarely taken because callers are helped at the time they initiate contact.
3. Statistics confirm an increase in productivity—fewer abandoned calls, decreased answering delays, and increased availability as evidenced by “ready” time
4. Positive anecdotal feedback from patients and staff
5. Staff resources are now appropriately utilized—nurses do the medical triage and PAs make routine appointments

► Lessons Learned:
When the processes and staffing patterns changed, it became necessary to provide supervision and additional training. Enhanced communication among the providers included a Call Center Newsletter, regular staff meetings and one-on-one meetings.

► Next Steps:
Continue moving closer to demand management.

► Contacts:
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New and Improved ACD System

Thank you for calling University Health Services. If this is a medical emergency, please hang up and dial "911".

If you are calling regarding a mental health crisis, press 1.

If you wish to cancel an appointment, press 2.

For Counseling & Consultation Services, press 3.

For all Medical Services, press 4.

If you are a healthcare provider needing to reach a member of our clinical staff, press 5.

If you have questions regarding the Student Health Insurance Plan, press 6.

For all other questions, press 7.

To repeat this message, press 8.

If you call (608) 265-5600, M - F, 8:30 - 5:00

Enqueues in a high priority queue that will be answered by a Counseling receptionist.

Enqueues for the next available receptionist who will cancel your appointment.

Enqueues for the next available receptionist who will schedule your appointment.

Enqueues for the next available Counseling receptionist who will answer your question.

Enqueues for the next available Receptionist who will answer your question.

Enqueued for the next available RN who will answer your question.

Transferred to a voice mailbox to record name and request. An RN will return the call.

Enqueued for the next available RN who will answer you question.

Transferred to the Student Health Insurance Office.

Enqueues for the next available Student Health Advocate who will answer your question or route you to someone who can.

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