

## SAME DAY ACCESS

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Same day or open access allows patients to see their provider the day they call for an appointment. To accommodate these calls, scheduling leaves a specific number of appointments available each day to accommodate same-day needs based on previously documented demand. The availability of same-day appointments can:

- reduce unnecessary emergency or urgent care utilization
- reduce retail clinic utilization
- maintain continuity of care
- improve quality of care
- improve patient experience
- reduce overall cost of care.

Before implementing same-day access, it is important to assess your current supply and demand for appointments. Consider the following:

- How many open appointments are currently available per day?
- How many requests for same day appointments are received per day?
- How many calls are being triaged and sent to the urgent care, the emergency room, or asked to make appointments in the future due to no availability?
- How many avoidable emergency room or urgent care visits are occurring each day?

*Refer to 'Managing Supply and Demand' content to learn more about measuring supply and demand for patient access.*

- When is your 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> next available appointment (by appointment type)? *Refer to 'Third Next Available Appointment' to learn more.*

Once a baseline is determined, develop a plan to pilot the addition of same-day appointments for one provider in the practice. Involve all members of that provider's care team including schedulers and front-desk staff who check patients in upon arrival.

Include the following items in your test of change:

1. Determine how long you will test the ability of same-day access to maintain balance between supply and demand. We suggest 3-5 days to get a snapshot of activity. You may want to repeat this process during specifically high-volume times such as back to school, school breaks, or flu season, etc.
  - Identify when same-day appointments are typically needed based on your baseline data; e.g. Monday mornings, Friday afternoons, etc.
2. Add open appointments to the provider's schedule reserved for same-day appointments
  - Communicate to the team these appointments are reserved for same-day appointments only. Emphasize how important it is to keep them for same day, especially during the pilot or test phase.
3. Continue to track the demand for same day appointments for the selected provider and note when able to meet the demand, e.g. manual tick marks on a tracking sheet, n

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- Develop/implement a process for calling patients for same day access when appointment becomes available due to a cancellation.

#### 4. Evaluate supply and demand equilibrium.

- Were patient demands met with initial number of same day appointments available?
- If yes, were too many slots available? Consider taking a step back to re-evaluate the optimal number of open appointments required.
- If no, how many requests were deferred? How did you determine how many were needed? Who made the decision to add them? How was this communicated to the provider, care team, front desk?
- How many scheduled appointment slots were left open because of no shows?
- How can you reduce the number of no-shows? (Coming soon – Reducing and Managing Appointment No-Shows)
- What changes need to be made to improve supply/demand balance?
- How could this process be improved before implemented with the next provider or across the practice?

Are you ready to implement this process with other providers?

1. Make sure to document the process either in a workflow or step by step process document and shared with the teams of the other providers. Include any learnings you experienced through the PDSA cycles. Consider introducing the process at a staff meeting to provide results of the initial pilot along with the plan for implementation across providers.
2. Engage the pilot team in presenting results and in supporting the process across the practice.
3. Be sure to note in your new patient packets or on your website/patient portal that you have same day appointments available. Also consider using posters, postcards, or the communication method most effective for your practice, to communicate this new convenience to your patients.

Continue to monitor your same day appointment availability and utilization and adjust for seasonal demand as needed. If supply for same-day appointments is too high, appointments will not be used and revenue will be lost. If demand is too high and there are not enough same day appointments patients will continue to utilize other providers and emergency room/urgent care facilities thus driving up the total cost of care.

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