

4 Ways to Reduce Waiting Times



In order to provide better health care, it is important for hospitals to reduce their wait times, particularly in the emergency department (ED).

It is a fact that patients who are treated quickly have better health outcomes as compared to those who have to wait for a long time. This is especially true for health conditions such as heart attacks and strokes where every second counts and every second is critical for the recovery and survival of the patient.

The Institute of Medicine recently released a report about wait times. The report outlines its causes and recommends solutions as to how hospitals can solve this problem. The major causes of long wait times as highlighted in this report include:

- mismatched supply and demand
- care and reimbursement complexity
- a provider-focused approach to scheduling, and
- financial and geographic barriers.

The report suggests that hospitals need to adopt concepts from other industries such as lean management and Six Sigma as the application of these ideas can help improve efficiency without hampering quality of care. Four strategies can be attempted to improve patient waiting times:

1. **Revamp the front-line scheduling process:** Surgeries and other non-life-threatening procedures should be scheduled on the basis of supply and demand. All such procedures should be scheduled on days which are less likely to have a high patient volume.
2. **Make reducing wait times a part of the hospital's culture:** Reducing waiting times should be a priority for all healthcare facilities. Specific policies should be designed and implemented to address problems of increased waiting times and staffing policies. Hospitals should regularly evaluate their work flow and should invest in solutions that are geared towards speeding up care delivery such as automated systems designed to streamline scheduling.
3. **Incorporate patient preferences:** The focus of all scheduling activities should be patients and not the providers. Hospitals should focus on identifying solutions that are designed to meet patient needs. For example some hospitals provide patients access to systems where they can make their own ED appointments while others provide patients estimates over the phone with respect to expected wait times before they arrive.
4. **Consider alternate methods of care delivery:** Hospitals can also try various ways of treating patients in order to reduce wait times. One such solution is Telemedicine for patients with less serious issues; partnering with nearby urgent care clinics and other healthcare entities is another possible option.

Source: [Healthcare Business & Technology](#)

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