

BECKER'S Hospital Review

Cleveland Clinic's Call Center Improves Care Access

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In July, Cleveland Clinic Innovations, the corporate venturing arm of the healthcare organization, partnered with Irish company Rigney Dolphin to form [RelateCare](#), a contact center solutions firm. The goal is to help healthcare organizations connect patients with their providers through more efficient appointment scheduling and communication. RelateCare will offer appointment management and post-discharge communication as well as consulting services to clients. In addition, hospitals and other organizations will have the opportunity to visit Cleveland Clinic's call center, called Access to Care, to observe best practices.



Cleveland Clinic Access to Care

Cleveland Clinic centralized its scheduling departments to improve efficiency, access to services and patient satisfaction about five years ago. Since then, the rate of abandoned calls has decreased 28 percent and the scheduling error rate dropped to less than 1 percent. In addition, physicians' utilization of scheduling templates increased 3 percent, appointment convenience increased 3 percent and physician visits rose 12 percent. "By centralizing, we were able to capitalize on economies of scale," says Patty Nahra, executive director of the call center.

In the past, Cleveland Clinic's different institutes and services had their own scheduling staff that made appointments only in their assigned area. To determine which physician to schedule, staff used paper-based methods such as notes. Now, an electronic scheduling system guides staff to the appropriate physician based on the words patients use when they call. For example, if the patient mentions he or she has a headache, the scheduling system asks schedulers a series of questions related to headaches that eventually lead to the appropriate department and physician for the patient.

This increased efficiency benefits the patient, physician, scheduler and call center leaders. Patients can schedule an appointment more easily, which increases both patient and physician satisfaction. On a six-point scale, the average patient satisfaction level with the call center is 5.7, based on a survey conducted at the end of the patient's call, according to Ms. Nahra.

In addition, call center leaders do not need to hire as many staff and do not need to spend as much time on training. Although the call center hired more staff when scheduling was initially centralized, it has not needed to hire additional staff despite an increase in call volume, according to Ms. Nahra. Furthermore, in the past, training someone to schedule appointments for multiple physicians could take six months; now, it takes only two weeks, she says.

"Centralized models for scheduling increase accuracy and patient access. We believe other hospitals and health systems can adopt this model and achieve similar results," she says.