

## Access to Specialists

### *Essential Behaviors to Improve the Patient Experience*

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#### **Q. In the last 3 months, how often was it easy to get appointments with specialists?**

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- **Set expectations with patients if you are referring them to a specialist and maintain awareness of the timing to see various specialists.** For example, be aware that it takes an average of 30 days to see a gastroenterologist and 60 days to see a cardiologist. Even if the time frame for an appointment is long, setting expectations gives context to the patient.
- **Use phone scripts with established customer service standards.**
  - **Greet every patient with expected, conventional elements:** address the patient by name, ask how he or she is, listen to the patient’s response, and finally offer a general statement of what may be done. For example, “Hello Ms. Smith, how are you today? Thank you for being a patient of General Clinic—how may I help you?”
  - Although patients are evaluating the ease of reaching the clinic, strong communication skills will start the interaction in a positive way from the outset. **Acknowledge that patients may be anxious about problems and issues, and relay gratitude for patients’ business and patience.**
- **Remain positive when responding to the patient.** If you are unable to accommodate their request, immediately offer an alternative.
- **Offer options whenever possible.** Patients feel empowered by choice and autonomy, even if it is not their first preference.

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#### **Q. In the last 3 months, how often did the specialist you saw most seem to know the important information about your medical history?**

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- **Confirm information in the medical record with the patient, especially as it pertains to information from other providers the patient sees.** For example, “I see your primary care physician talked with you about your high blood pressure last week and switched medications.”
- **Because specialists often see patients with less frequency than their traditional provider, use phrases to note memories related to the patient.** For example, a phrase as simple as, “I remember ...” can remind patients that you remember them and elements related to their care.
- **Encourage patients to become active members of their own care team.** Care coordination is most effective when patients are empowered to be active participants in managing their disease along with their care providers.
  - Give patients notebooks that can be carried along to each health care appointment. Encourage patients to use this notebook to record important information, to log questions, to record medications and dosages, etc.
- **Avoid talking negatively about other physicians.** If you do not agree with other physicians’ decisions or care, do not express this to the patient.