

# Central Scheduling Efficiency Improves 56%



## **T**he Problem

This 180-bed, not-for-profit medical center faced the daunting task of building efficient outpatient scheduling procedures from the ground up. Although the center had dedicated significant resources to a new centralized-scheduling department, patients still faced a high number of postponed and cancelled procedures due to delayed, lost, or mismatched paperwork. The center turned to Healthcare Performance Partners (HPP) for assistance in crafting scheduling practices, using LEAN HEALTHCARE principles, that would maximize the positive impact of the new department.

## **The LEAN Healthcare Solution**

HPP led a LEAN HEALTHCARE and intervention team in a one-week Kaizen Event, a LEAN process centered around a team based approach to analyze problems. Team members identified existing scheduling procedures, examined the rationale behind those procedures, and brainstormed ways to build a better, permanent system. With HPP's help, the team quickly located two primary areas of inefficiency:

- Wide variances in the amount of time different employees took to complete the same task
- Poor execution of critical tasks such as obtaining physician's orders or scheduling imminent procedures.

Using LEAN HEALTHCARE tools such as process mapping, visual controls, pull systems, Poka-Yoke and spaghetti diagrams, the team determined that a lack of standardized filing and work procedures, plus poor internal and external communication, were at the root of these problems.

The team crafted a solution, in part, by creating standardized work plans for each step in the scheduling process: scheduling (initial patient contact), quality assurance, insurance/order verification, and pre-registration. These standardized plans guide staff through each task in the day and provide standards that can be used in performance evaluations and process automation. By reordering the workflow to ensure early attention to critical tasks, the plans also help staff address delays or omissions before they cause postponement or cancellation of patient procedures.

To address communication issues and to insure standardization, HPP assisted the team in writing telephone scripts for calls to insurance companies and medical offices. The scripts help staff tactfully but forcefully communicate their need for timely benefit verification and physicians' orders. The team also worked internally to create a labeling system that clearly identifies time-sensitive files, and team members arranged for reconfiguration of phone lines to facilitate more efficient communication between scheduling and patient-care departments.

## **The Outcome**

With the LEAN HEALTHCARE solution in place, scheduling efficiency and effectiveness increased dramatically. Total work time for the scheduling process decreased 56%, accompanied by a noticeable drop in the number of postponed or cancelled patient procedures. With backup staff assigned to scheduling, the department is able to maintain this level of excellence even during peak workload hours.



To discuss how HPP can assist with your LEAN HEALTHCARE journey or Six Sigma Implementation: Call 615-265-2002 or e-mail: [chagood@hpp.bz](mailto:chagood@hpp.bz)  
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