



Trying Patience, Losing Patients

An analysis of how doctor visit wait time correlates to patient satisfaction.

Abstract

Analysis of current MedStatix survey data reveals that wait time is a reliable predictor of patient satisfaction. We analyzed feedback from over 210,000 patients to see how wait time affected their satisfaction with their providers and practices.

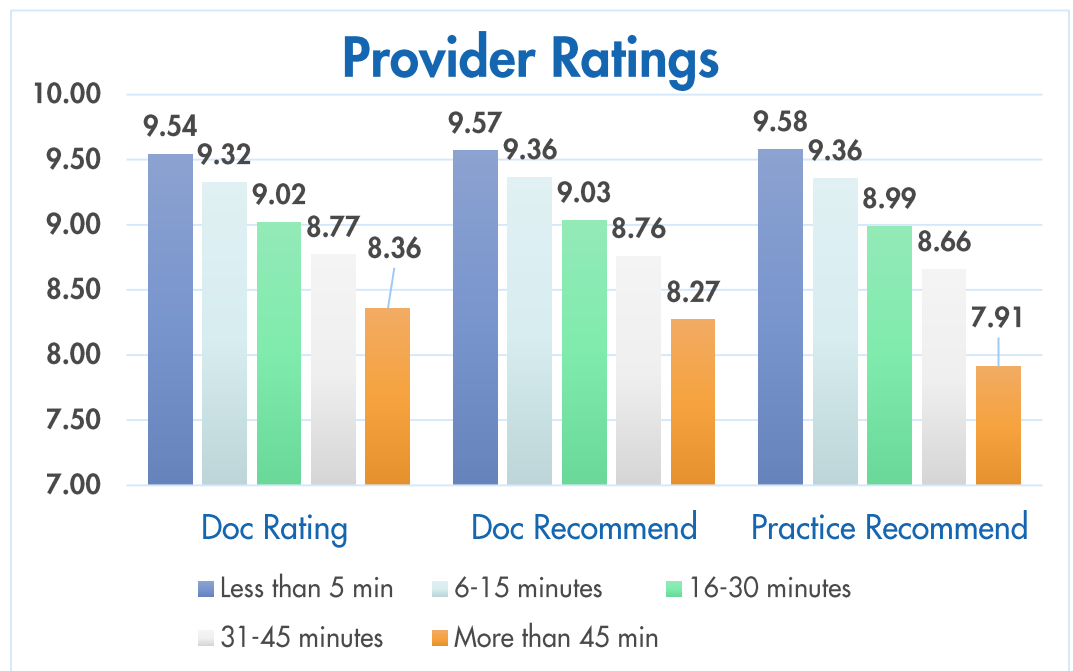
Those patients who waited five minutes or less rated their provider 9.54 on a 10-point scale. That same provider rating dropped to 8.36 when the wait expanded over 45 minutes.

Wait Times

On the Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS) survey in 2014, patients were asked if they were seen in 15 minutes or less. Of the 308,000 surveyed, 82% said they were "always" or "usually" seen within 15 minutes.

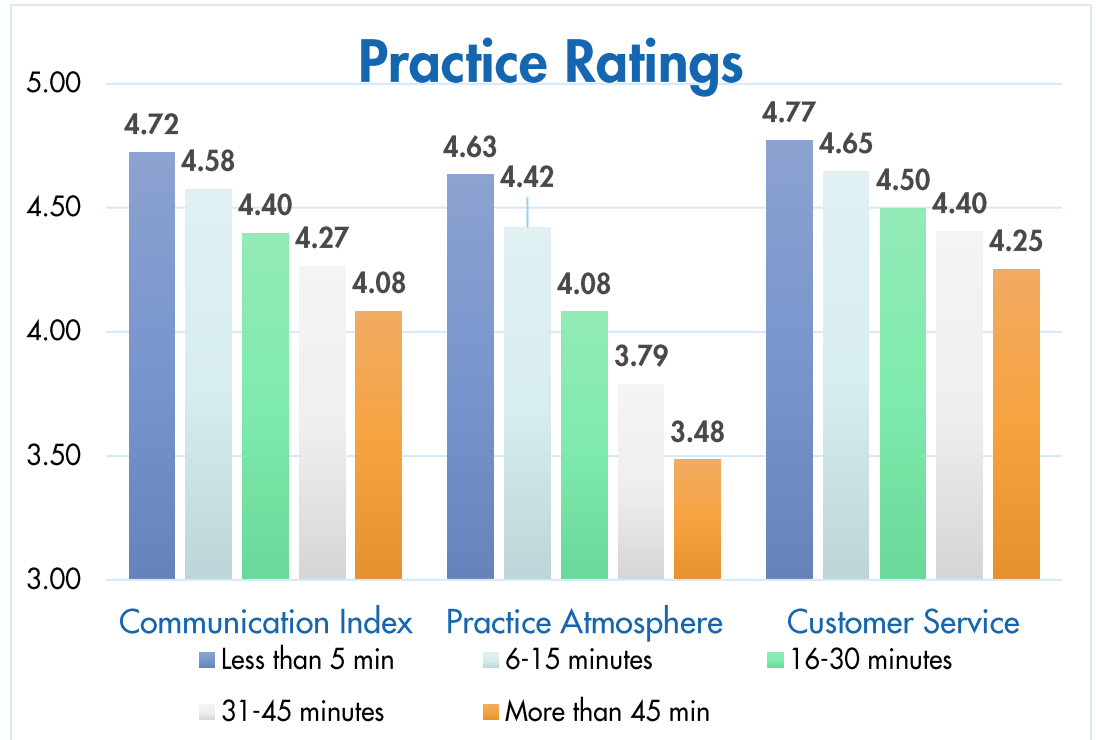
According to the MedStatix data, those patients who waited five minutes or less rated their provider 9.54 on a 10-point scale. That same provider rating dropped to 8.36 when wait times extended to more than 45 minutes—a 13% decline in satisfaction. Patients are making a clear statement: the longer the wait, the lower the provider rating.

The wait time also affects whether they would recommend a provider or practice to other prospective patients, as shown in the graph below:



The shorter the wait, the higher your practice will be rated. And if wait times extend to more than 45 minutes, the "office atmosphere" scores are alarmingly low. In fact, the practice atmosphere rating drops all the way down to a 3.48 (on a scale out of 5) when a patient has to wait more than 45 minutes. That's a 25% drop in comparison to those that waited less than 5 minutes.

The shorter the wait, the higher your practice will be rated.



Comments from patients further confirm this fact. We compiled a list of comments from patients that are unlikely to recommend your practice, a set that our MedStatix platform categorizes as “detractors”. They all show a common theme.

- "Wait time was unacceptable at WELL over an hour."
- "Wait time was ridiculously long."
- "Being 35 minutes past my scheduled appointment time, I felt he like he rushed through my visit to try to make up for being behind schedule."
- "I waited 1 1/2 hours for a simple appointment. That was just to be taken into an exam room, then another 45 minutes to wait for the Doctor. Unacceptable."

Conclusion

Big data can give the impression that things are more complicated than they really are. It's easy to walk into a staff meeting with ten to twelve possible solutions to improve patient satisfaction. Next time around, have your team focus on one simple solution: communicate with patients about wait times. The data is clear: moving the wait time needle in the right direction has a cascading affect for everything that happens afterward. Communication is a

key driver of satisfaction and an analysis of free-form comments shows those that did have to wait and were informed gave higher scores than those that weren't.

The reason for patient frustration might be related to lost time and costs incurred. A recent study from Harvard Medical School¹ looked at the total time and money invested for a patient.

"The study estimates that the typical visit to a doctor consumes 121 minutes of the patient's time — 37 minutes in travel, 64 minutes waiting for care or filling out forms, and only 20 minutes face to face with the physician. Based on the average sum a person could earn if working during that time, the researchers figure, it costs patients \$43 in lost time for each medical visit — more than the average out-of-pocket cost for the care itself, which is about \$32."

The Institute of Medicine² recommends implementing these 5 strategies to mitigate wait time.

- Immediately engage patient concerns
- Solicit patient feedback on their preferences for timing and nature of care
- Establish contingency plans for patient surges
- Promote alternatives to in-person physician care, such as wider use of non-physician providers and telephone consultation
- Conduct ongoing evaluation of both wait times and conditions in each care setting

Employing any of these solutions to reduce wait times is a simple way to immediately address patient satisfaction. Improving efficiency and patient communication will result in happy patients, more recommendations, and ensured future success.

References

¹<http://www.ajmc.com/journals/issue/2015/2015-vol21-n8/Opportunity-Costs-of-Ambulatory-Medical-Care-in-the-United-States>

²<http://www8.nationalacademies.org/onpinews/newsitem.aspx?RecordID=20220>



About MedStatix, LLC.

MedStatix patient experience platform is a quantitative and qualitative analysis platform that delivers health care providers actionable insights from the voice of their patients.

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