CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE FOR MEDICAL PRACTICES
Tips to Improve Satisfaction with Wait Time

Do—

- Change the name of the "waiting room" to the "reception area" to change staff and patient perceptions.
- Schedule appointments to suit an individual physician's practice patterns. Not every physician uses the same amount of time to see a patient.
- Call patients to remind them of their appointments (especially those scheduled for a large block of time).

Or

Send appointment reminders. Reminders will result in fewer no-shows and less need to overbook. Inform the patient of the importance of keeping their appointment and arriving on time. Tell them to bring their insurance identification card.

- Pull charts early and prepare for physician use. Prepare charts for new patients ahead of time.
- Be sure to start the first appointment of the day on time.
- Create flow sheets that allow physicians to record information during the visit and to communicate orders to staff members without having to wait for them in the hall.
- Ask patients to complete the "Confidential Patient Agenda" while they are in the reception area.

Don’t—

- Do not encourage patients to walk in without an appointment. This creates a vicious cycle. Instead tell walk-in patients that they will be seen when the doctor is available.
- Do not surprise patients. Let patients know about limits to access. For example, inform parents that routine well-child activities and care for well siblings will not be provided during a sick child visit.
- Do not ignore patients when they enter the reception area or if they have been waiting for a while.

Strategies—

Even with the best management of the schedule, the physician may still run late. Use the following strategies to diffuse patients' dissatisfaction.

- Inform patients that the physician is running late when they arrive at the office
- Inform patients of the expected wait-time
- Offer patients the opportunity to come back in an hour or to reschedule
- Make the wait less burdensome by limiting the wait time in the exam room

Consider adding the following amenities:

- Library of consumer-friendly medical information
- Health-related videos
- Recipe bin featuring healthy recipes
- Coffee, tea, water
- Television
- Piped in music
- Children's play area
- Telephone for local calls