

# WAIT TIME COMMUNICATION

## In Outpatient/Ambulatory Departments

### INTRODUCTION

One of the most powerful techniques to improve and sustain an outpatient department or ambulatory care experience that drives patient loyalty is implementing ways to keep patients informed throughout their visit. When patients make outpatient/ambulatory appointments, they typically expect more expedited care and higher degrees of responsiveness than in the emergency and inpatient care settings - especially if they plan to return to work or appointments following their care. At PRC, we often see wait times emerge as a key driver for outpatient and ambulatory care experiences. While what is deemed an acceptable wait time varies from individual to individual, we have designed this resource based on our work with many organizations improving patient perceptions of waiting.

PRC measures wait times by asking patients to evaluate the following example questions on an Excellent to Poor scale:

- How would you rate the length of time you waited in the waiting area?
- Overall, how would you rate the staff on informing you about any waiting or delays that you may have experienced during the visit?

### WHY DO THESE ELEMENTS OF CARE MATTER?

While nearly every outpatient, ambulatory and/or clinic care setting is dedicated in some way to enhance process and optimize patient flow through the visit, it is important to remember that setting expectations and communicating can buy patient and family “good will”, reassure them that the facility provides excellent care, and reinforce that they are in excellent hands. Specifically, we find it essential to introduce communication and tactics to keep patients informed regardless of the length of stay in the center, especially if the patient experiences delays.

In any service experience (travel, customer care hotlines, eating out) we appreciate being kept informed. In the outpatient setting, people experience anxiety, likely are very uncomfortable or don't feel well, and want to return to their normal activities. Among patients' top thoughts and concerns are:

What is going on?

How soon will I be seen?

When will the doctor be in?

I am terrified...Why are my lab/imaging results taking so long?

Did they find a problem?

What am I waiting for?

It is 30 minutes past my appointment time.

I am in so much pain...

How long will this take until I can go home/back to work?

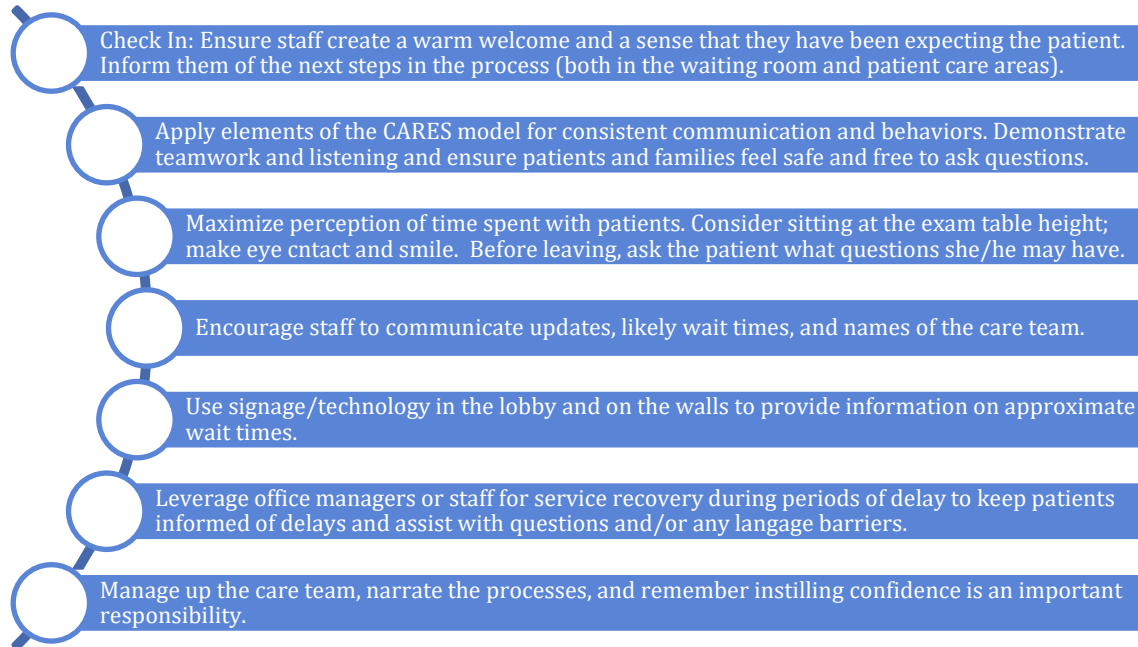
Am I a priority?



Addressing these questions proactively will go a long way to build relationships, instill confidence, create trust, and provide an excellent service experience for patients and their loved ones during their visit.

## COMMUNICATION TO CONVEY INTENT

### 7 Strategies to Elevate Communication and Information



### Key Phrases to Support Communication

- At Registration... Welcome Mrs/Mr \_\_\_\_\_. We are going to take excellent care of you today. I am sorry you are ill. We have a highly trained team and you are in good hands.
- Our Imaging Center is the best in the area. Many patients trust us with their care. That means today, it may take us a bit longer to care for you than our usual goal; however, you are in excellent hands and you can expect the highest quality care.
- My name is \_\_\_\_\_. My role is \_\_\_\_\_. Here is how I provide you with excellent care: \_\_\_\_\_
- I have an update for you about...
- How can I keep you comfortable during your wait?

