Third Next Available Appointment

Why and How to Measure

Eliminating the delay for an appointment in your health center is key to having the ability to provide same day access to your patients.

The third next available appointment (TNAA) is a measure of the delay your patients experience in accessing providers for a scheduled appointment. The TNAA is considered a more accurate system measure of access than the "next available" appointment since the next or even the second next available appointment may have become available due to a cancellation or other event that is not predictable or reliable. For access to be a permanent system property, TNAA should be zero to one day, with few exceptions. When there are more part-time versus full-time providers, TNAA typically is going to exceed zero to one days. For providers who work part time at less than 0.6 FTE, you begin to have to choose between access and continuity for patients because you cannot offer both—unless you have a provider team that is constructed to provide an FTE over a full week.

Why TNAA is Important

- High TNAA indicates a clogged and backlogged system which typically results in:
  - Poor access and continuity.
  - Delay in care for patients, requiring them to wait for care they may need now.
  - High no-show rates.
  - High walk-in/drop-in rates.
- It is a good single indicator of the successful balance between capacity and demand in the system.
- Knowing that the TNAA is high in your health center can help you to focus on ways to reduce demand and optimize capacity using some or all of the following tactics:
  - Extending re-visit intervals and having the patient call for their next appointment versus pre-scheduling an appointment.
  - Using new methods/technology for meeting patient needs (e.g., phone, email, patient portal).
  - Creating alternative processes to face-to-face visits with a provider for some services and needs (e.g., forms, blood work, test results, pharmacy refills, referrals).
  - Reviewing the schedule to remove unnecessary visits.
  - Using the patient care team as fully as possible for specific services and follow-up.

How to Measure TNAA

- The TNAA should be measured regularly for each provider. As you start out, the TNAA should be measured once a week to get an accurate picture of access and of your progress as you work to reduce the TNAA. This more frequent measure gives you information you need to assess the impact on the backlog of the changes you are making. Once the TNAA has become stable at the targeted zero to one days, it can be monitored monthly.
- Select one team member with access to the scheduling system to run the TNAA measure.
- Choose the same day of the week and the same time of day to measure each time.
- To determine the TNAA, look at schedule and ask: "As of right now, what is the third next available appointment for this provider?"

A simple rule: Count all calendar days including days off, weekends, and holidays as it makes it easier to compare patient wait time across providers and, most importantly, throughout the practice. This makes TNAA a patient-focused measure.

- Determine TNAA for new visits and return visits separately for each provider. You can determine TNAA for other visit types if they make up a large proportion of the visits in your system.
- Do not count as open any visit type that is not available for general scheduling use or that are held for use on a particular day. This includes appointments held for same-day appointments or those that might be held for urgent care or walk-in patients.
- You can count any appointment that is being held for a same-day visit on the day you take the measure. Note: Count this appointment only once and only for the appointment type (e.g., new, return) for which it is being held.

How to Record TNAA

- Use the attached sheet to list the providers in your health center and then record the date the TNAA measure is taken. Write the date of the third next available appointment in the second column and then record the number of days to the third appointment in the last column. You can cluster providers by clinic within your health center and for providers at other sites within your network.
- Note the date of the third next available appointment. Record the number of days from today to the third next available appointment. Today is day zero; tomorrow is day one, and so forth. For example, if there are three appointments available today, the TNAA is zero. If the third next available is tomorrow, the TNAA is one; the day after that the TNAA is two.
- Do this for new visits and return visits for each provider, if you use both types of visits.

TNAA Worksheet		
Name of Health Center: **Visit Type:**		**TNAA Measure Date**
Name of Provider and Clinic	**Date of Third Next Available Appointment**	**Number of Days to the Third**
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		
11.		
12.		
13.		
14.		
15.		

Safety Net Medical Home Initiative

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The objective of the Safety Net Medical Home Initiative was to develop and demonstrate a replicable and sustainable implementation model to transform primary care safety net practices into patient-centered medical homes with benchmark performance in quality, efficiency, and patient experience. The Initiative was administered by Qualis Health and conducted in partnership with the MacColl Center for Health Care Innovation at the Group Health Research Institute. Five regions were selected for participation (Colorado, Idaho, Massachusetts, Oregon and Pittsburgh), representing 65 safety net practices across the U.S.

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