

9) Clustering Appointments by Languages

Tufts Medical Center

Heidi Waitkus, Executive Director of Patient Care Services; HWaitkus@tuftsmedicalcenter.org

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Because of the unique location of our institution, we have a great demand for Chinese interpreters. Because there are so many requests to book Chinese interpreters and we have only a limited staff to draw from, we realized that the system we were using would not allow us to satisfy the multitude of requests. In order to meet this challenge, our Interpreter Services, working together with many different outpatient clinics and providers, came up with a Clustering strategy to scheduling Chinese and Vietnamese patients. This involved asking clinics to schedule most of their Chinese and Vietnamese patients either in the morning or afternoon, in close proximity to each other. In this way, one or two interpreters could report to a certain clinic during the clustering time and meet the needs of 20-30 patients in a much more efficient manner. The Clustering program has been deemed highly successful by patients, clinics and Interpreter services. Clinics typically utilize the clustering program one to five times a week which has drastically reduced the time that Chinese and Vietnamese patients have to wait between scheduling their appointments and actually seeing their doctors for needed care. After implementing the program, our state Dept. of Public Health learned of its effectiveness and has been recommending it as a best practice for other hospitals.

As a result of this program plus phone interpretations, our total encounters per the year increased noticeably. From FY 2009 to FY 2014, total patient encounters have increased from 57,058 to 70,396, a 23.4% increase over FY 09

OUTCOMES ACHIEVED

- Patient encounters 70,396 in FY14. Significantly increased the total encounters since we initiated this Clustering program in FY09.
- Decreased interval between scheduling and delivery of medical care.
- Ability for Interpreters to more efficiently use their time by reporting to a clinic during the clustering period and serve more patients.
- Ability for clinics to more efficiently provide services to their non-native speaking patients
- The Clustering programs resulting in greater patient sensitivity and efficiency which impact all the care we do for better patients services.
- Patient satisfaction is being enhanced through improved communication in timely manner between patient, family and health care provider.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Finding win-win solutions for Interpreter Services, clinics and patients ends up providing higher quality medical care
- More efficient services increase favorable perspectives of patients toward hospital staff which contributes to their sense of being well-cared for.
- Even daunting problems can be solved when professionals collaborate for the benefit of enhanced patient care