

The New Healthcare Access Center: Improving Access to Care



Our partnership with FTI Consulting has been great. Their industry expertise was fundamentally important in shaping the design, development and implementation of several of our access improvement strategies. FTI Consulting is a valued and respected partner.

— Bill Gable
Vice President of Duke Health Access Services
Duke Health

Duke Health

SITUATION: A WORLD-CLASS HEALTH SYSTEM REINVENTS PATIENT ACCESS

The Private Diagnostic Clinic (PDC) is the faculty practice plan at Duke University. The PDC has about 1,600 providers in over 70 ambulatory clinic locations conducting more than 3.5 million office visits.

Although the nearly 1,600 physician-members provided excellent clinical care through the PDC, the clinical leadership was not satisfied with the experience patients and referring providers had trying to schedule timely appointments. Long hold times at appointment centers, high abandonment rates and scheduling-related errors led to frequent complaints from patients and providers.

Providers recognized the need to find a way to improve patient access by redesigning the scheduling process in a way that would reduce costs, eliminate errors and meet changing consumer expectations for faster, more convenient access and service, including access through mobile devices and self-scheduling options.

FTI CONSULTING ROLE: HELPING CHART THE SOLUTION

The PDC and Duke University Health System (DUHS) partnered with FTI Consulting to improve the PDC patient access model. At the start of the partnership, DUHS had 32 separately-managed appointment centers in eight different buildings staffed by nearly 200 employees using 15 unique organizational structures.

DUHS and FTI Consulting concluded that new centralized governance and management structures were needed to bring more consistency to scheduling workflows and processes and enable real-time oversight.



By developing guided scheduling questionnaires, standardized provider templates and new telephony and reporting systems, FTI Consulting helped DUHS lay the groundwork for a management structure that would reduce errors, improve efficiency and access to care and deliver a better, more consistent customer service experience.

Working with FTI Consulting, DUHS separated the scheduling function and related support services from its revenue management organization and rebranded the appointment centers “access centers” to more accurately reflect the scope of responsibilities and the importance of their role. In July of 2015, these centers became their own business unit: Duke Health Access Services. The access centers are now centrally managed with many having transitioned to a single location.

FTI Consulting partnered with DUHS to develop the access center organizational and operational infrastructure including key performance indicators (KPIs). The access center has a dedicated performance improvement manager, supported by an analytics team. The role of the performance manager is to infuse an ethos and continuous improvement into the fabric, day-to-day operations, learning and ultimately the access center performance.

A key component of the work done by FTI Consulting was its partnership with DUHS to win buy-in from providers and administrators by showing how the newly standardized access centers would improve the entire customer experience journey, help facilitate timely access to care for the patients who needed it most, and allow the organization to use its resources more effectively and efficiently. The effort created sustained value and improved customer service.

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IMPACT:

NEW EFFICIENCIES ENABLE IMPROVEMENTS IN SERVICE AND ACCESS

The new centralized access center has achieved significant improvements in patient access while reducing scheduling errors. By improving the total access experience, DUHS succeeded in cutting abandonment rates almost in half (from more than 11 percent to just 6 percent). The continuous improvement team within the access center aims to shrink that abandonment rate even further.

The consolidated access center uses new operating procedures and technologies such as the guided scheduling questionnaires built on an Epic software platform that allow workers in the access centers, PDC staff, or patients themselves to schedule appointments quickly with appropriate specialists and care team members. The centralized access center system not only allows better oversight and management of point-of-service scheduling; it also has the flexibility to accommodate outsourcing as needed to support growth in patient volume.

The patient self-service option, at 14,000 visits a month and growing, uses Epic’s MyChart functionality to meet the needs of certain market segments. Self-service represents a highly scalable model with low incremental costs. In addition, the creation of standards has allowed the use of outsourced options, giving DUHS the capability to manage growth in a tight labor market and to do so without adding the fixed costs associated with additional staff such as facilities personnel.

The centralized access function gives scheduling personnel more support, better tools and streamlined processes to achieve their goals. This continuity led to a reduction in errors and improvements in recruitment and training processes. Patient and physician satisfaction has markedly increased and Duke Access Services is an integral contributor to DUHS’s core mission of world-class patient care.

About FTI Consulting

FTI Consulting is an independent global business advisory firm dedicated to helping organizations manage change, mitigate risk and resolve disputes: financial, legal, operational, political & regulatory, reputational and transactional. FTI Consulting professionals, located in all major business centers throughout the world, work closely with clients to anticipate, illuminate and overcome complex business challenges and opportunities. For more information, visit www.fticonsulting.com and connect with us on Twitter (@FTIConsulting), Facebook and LinkedIn.