



Pittsburgh Regional Healthcare Initiative

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Why can't we eliminate waiting in the ASC at West Penn?

At this Ambulatory Surgery Center, a Perfecting Patient Care (PPC) Learning Unit, patients were waiting as much as an hour during registration. Answering the challenge, "Why can't we reduce the time it takes to register our patients?" the staff devised solutions.

The team reduced each registration encounter to an average of four minutes. But the team of seven workers still asked, "Why can't we eliminate waiting time for patients?"

Waiting "comes with the territory" when you're a patient. Right? The time patients spend waiting isn't usually defined as a *problem* needing a *solution*. Yet for patients facing surgery, the waiting can provoke needless and harmful anxiety.

Given new "eyes to see," registration team members at West Penn's Ambulatory Surgery Center realized that waiting was a problem for patients. Some patients waiting for testing grew frustrated and left. Others were

called to a bed before completing registration, delaying their surgical prep.

The registration clerks asked themselves, "Does it have to be this way? Why can't we reduce patients' registration time? How quickly could we do it, and by how much?"

The team members at West Penn's ASC are part of a collaborative Perfecting Patient Care Learning Unit. No longer do these employees face the exhausting task of working around

problems in the system. Instead, they are encouraged to continually discover problems, bring them to the surface, and help devise ways to fix them.

Repetition = waste

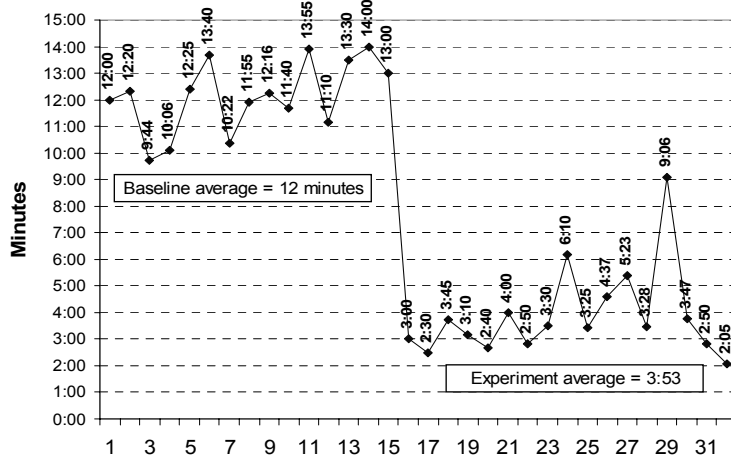
Why does a patient need to be present to register at all? The patient needs to be present to sign consents and receive an ID bracelet. However, during registration, team members needed to ask patients for missing personal information. For the most part, patients had already given this information by phone to another department in advance. A connection was broken: information received in one department was not making its way to the chart at registration.

The root cause of this registration problem lay in another department. Workers in that department devised solutions

**I DON'T EVER
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**—REGISTRATION CLERK
WEST PENN AMBULATORY
SURGERY CENTER
PPC LEARNING LINE**

How long does the individual registration encounter take?

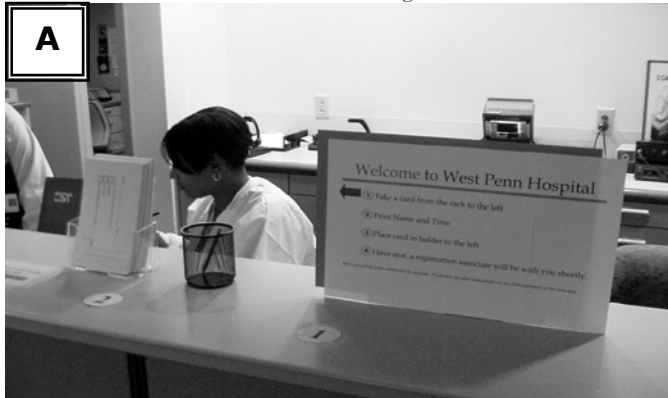


At first, it took about 12 minutes for the registration clerk to call the patient from the waiting room and complete the registration. After many refinements—like working with another department to make sure correct demographic information was on each chart beforehand—registration time dropped below 4 minutes.

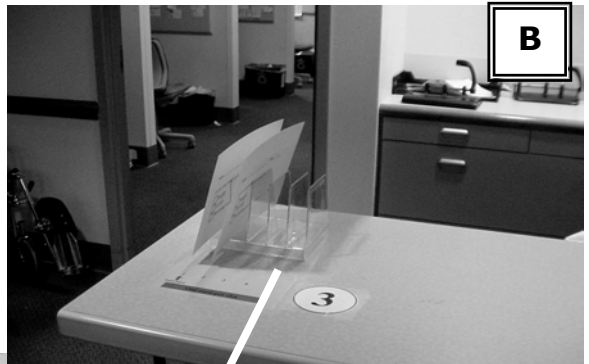
for their “customers,” the registration clerks. With correct personal patient information on every chart every time, registration time began to shorten. Further refinements led to even more improvements in the work flow.

“Why can’t we do even better?”

Although the time it took to register each patient dropped dramatically, the goal of the registration clerks had not yet been met: eliminating the time patients have to wait. In refining the registration work, they began to consider the delay that occurred because the registration clerk did not know when a patient had signed in. Although the



Easy visual cues: The sign-in area (A) welcomes patients, who sign bright yellow cards and place them in a card holder (B). As viewed from their desks, (C) the registration clerks can see whether cards are in the holder. If so, the next clerk instantly knows a patient is waiting.



- ❏ Patients are no longer waiting 45 minutes to an hour to have pre-testing completed.
- ❏ Staff are able to handle volume surges in the arrival rates without any significant problems.
- ❏ With stable timing established, the group has been able to focus on other changes aimed at an even

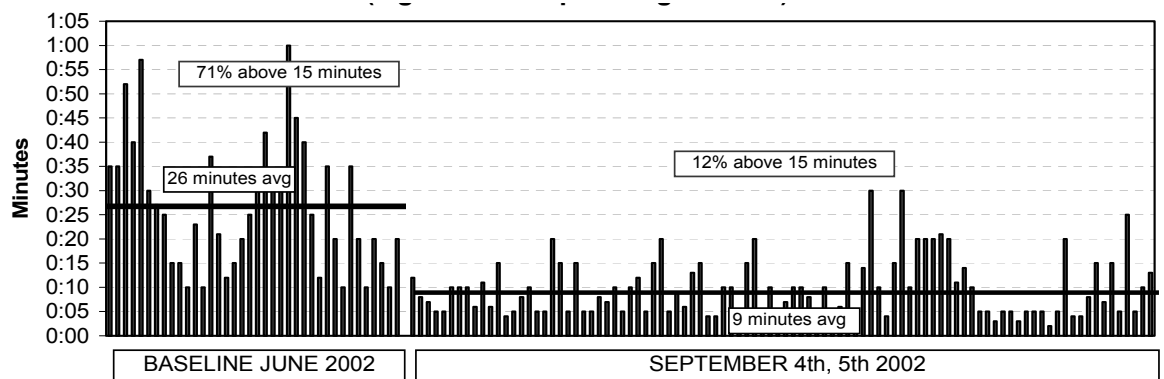
registration clerks rely on sign-in information, they work several feet away from the sign-in sheet. The goal of the secretaries and registration clerks—seven people in all—was to have a patient be able to walk in, and by signing in, let the clerks know they were there. The secretaries and registration clerks tried numerous experiments and modifications—including patients in their tests—before arriving at a redesign that worked.

more efficient flow through the pre-operative pathway. Says PPC coach, David Sharbaugh, “When people get frustrated in their daily work because the system makes it hard to be successful, the traditional response is to blame it on the system, the management, or to just disengage and simply come to work and ‘do your job.’ The Perfecting Patient Care System, above all else, is about helping

people to be successful in meaningful work. When workers begin to make small changes in their own work, they realize that they can change the system. Imagine 2,500 employees, every day making small changes that help better meet patient needs, eliminate waste, improve flow and increase productivity.”

One team member put it succinctly: “I don’t ever want to go back to doing it the old way!” ❏

Total patient registration time: from entrance to pre-op bed



The experiment cannot be said to be “done,” because further refinements are always under way. However, patient wait times have dropped dramatically, and the changes have been sustained for five months. The most significant improvements are:

Seven people making small changes in their work quickly reduced patient waiting times from up to an hour to just about 9 minutes. Unleashing the creativity of the people who do the work is a basic tenet of the Perfecting Patient Care System.

