

King County Project Access Reports Enviably Low No-Show Rate

by Mary Zwerling, Public Health, Seattle & King County
Program Manager, Managed Care & Client Services

Making sure King County Project Access (KCPA) patients show up for their scheduled specialty care appointment is critical to the success of the project. KCPA has a unique patient-centered case management system that has a proven success rate for patients showing up for their appointments.

KCPA recently completed a three-month intensive study on the success rate or "show" rate for scheduled specialty appointments. In the commercially insured population, a no-show rate of 15% or higher is common for both primary care and specialty care visits. In the safety net clinics (community and public health centers), the no-show rate for Medicaid and uninsured patients can be 30% or higher. "No-shows" either miss their appointment or do not call to cancel or reschedule.

The recent study completed by KCPA shows that only 6.8% of the patients KCPA appointed in a three-month period were no-shows!

KCPA's participating specialty providers volunteer their time and need each scheduled patient to show up for their appointment. These providers rely heavily on KCPA's patient-centered case management to avoid the inefficiencies no-shows cause to patient flow, unnecessary cost and practice resources.

When patients miss appointments, they are more likely to end up in the emergency department for care; their overall health status can become chronic. Patients who miss appointments tend to be younger adults of lower socioeconomic status. They often have a history of failed appointments, are uninsured or have

government-sponsored health care. Language, or culture, may contribute to barriers. They are less likely to understand why they need the specialty care they have been referred to.

King County Project Access' patients are the same low-income uninsured and underinsured population that miss medical appointments due to challenges with time off work, child care, transportation and understanding how the health care system works. Statistically, KCPA's no-show rate should mirror that of the safety-net, at about 30%. The favorable 24% difference in the no-show rate is directly attributable to KCPA's patient-centered case management model.

With this model, KCPA addresses patient barriers to keeping appointments in a positive and proactive manner. Starting with the initial first contact with the patient, KCPA case managers develop a relationship with the patient by working in a considerate and respectful manner to schedule needed specialty appointments with the patient's needs in mind.

The case managers assist the patient in understanding the importance of their healthcare and why they need to show up on time for their scheduled appointment. The patient is sent a follow-up communication that includes an appointment confirmation, a map to the physician's office, driving instructions and bus line information. Before the appointment is scheduled to take place, the case managers place a reminder phone call to the patient and provide the support needed to assure the patient shows up for the appointment as a prepared and responsible patient. Case management support may include discussing

transportation, child care or ordering a language interpreter. Reminder calls may also include pre-visit preparation education the patient needs for their appointment.

As a result of these efforts, KCPA is proud to boast the low 6.8% no-show rate supported by the recent three month study. With such a small percentage of no-shows, it is hard to discern statistically significant patterns but it is very interesting to note that the no-shows were evenly split between men and women. While one third of the patients we serve are non-English speakers, it is interesting that the English speaking patients had a higher no-show rate than the non-English speaking patients.

In reviewing the no-show data, the reasons patients told us they missed a scheduled appointment was that the majority of them did not receive reminder phone calls for reasons ranging from phone numbers that no longer worked to the ability of KCPA staff ability to make the number of reminder phone calls.

We will continue to pay careful attention to this critical detail in enrolling, appointing and assuring that patients get the specialty care that they need. In the meantime we're very proud of our no-show success.



For more information on King County Project Access please contact Executive Director, Sallie Neillie at 206-788-4204.

First printed in the April 2009 "Bulletin" vol. 88 no. 4. Reprinted with permission of the King County Medical Society.