



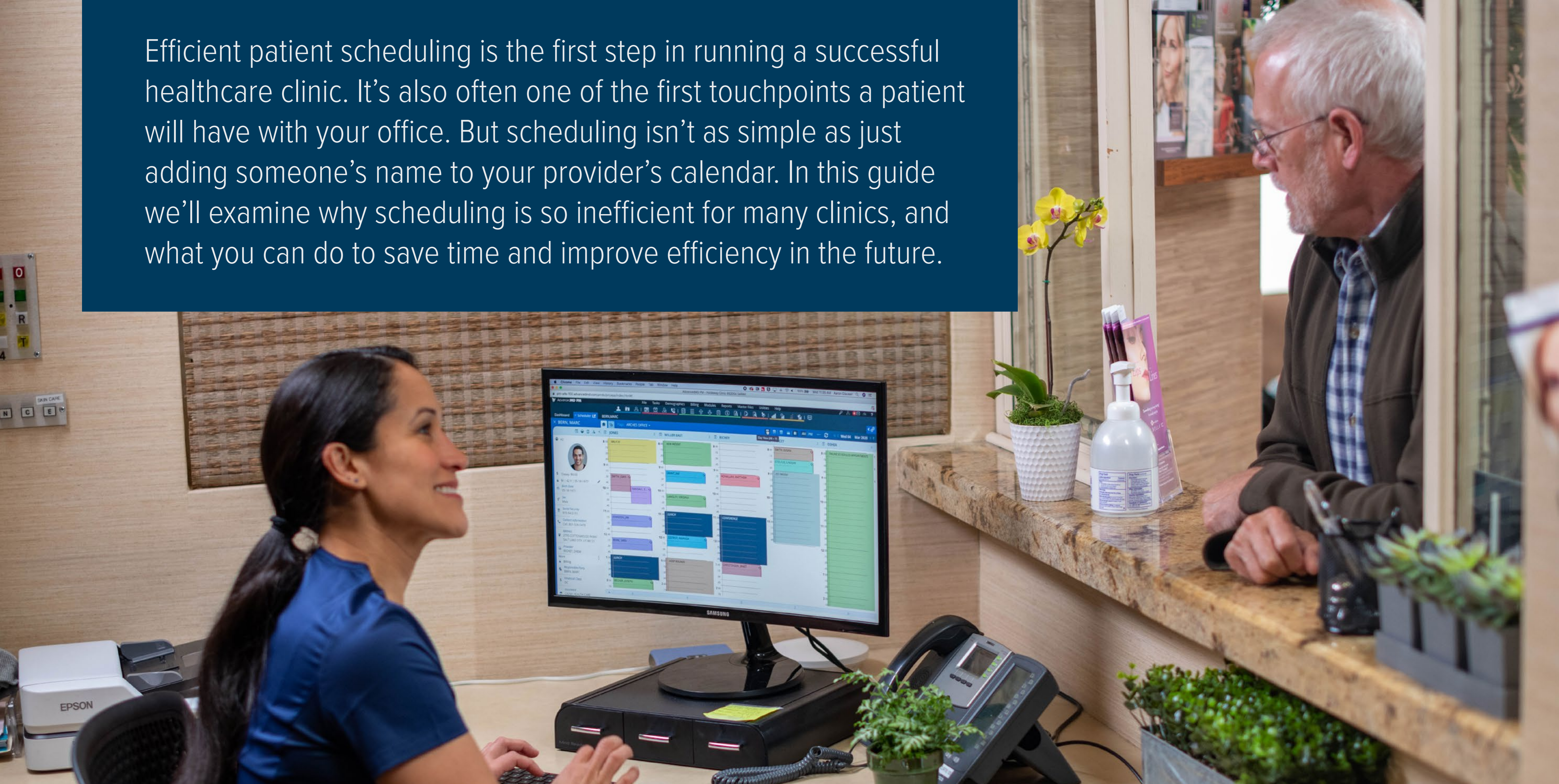
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Time-saving
Hacks
for Your
& Front Office
Scheduling
Team

AdvancedMD



Efficient patient scheduling is the first step in running a successful healthcare clinic. It's also often one of the first touchpoints a patient will have with your office. But scheduling isn't as simple as just adding someone's name to your provider's calendar. In this guide we'll examine why scheduling is so inefficient for many clinics, and what you can do to save time and improve efficiency in the future.



Why Medical Clinic Scheduling can be Inefficient and Frustrating

In today's digital world, there are very few appointments or reservations people cannot simply make online.

That is, until it's time to schedule a doctor's appointment. An estimated 88% of patients¹ still schedule their appointments entirely over the phone. And patients must remember to call during business hours to reach someone in a scheduling office. Once they contact the office, an employee on the other end must manually comb through multiple schedules for different providers—and sometimes

different clinic locations as well—to find the next available appointment.

They relay information about upcoming appointment times to the person patiently waiting on the phone, who then checks their own schedule to see if that day and time would work. This process goes back and forth until the provider and patient find a time that works for both parties.

This process can be even more complex for certain types of clinics. Primary care providers have to juggle same-day availability with the demands of patients who want an appointment to see a provider as soon as possible. No-show appointments or late arrivals can disrupt scheduling and make it hard to keep clinics running at optimal efficiency levels.



73%

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How to Improve Your Scheduling and Intake Efficiency

The good news is that there are options to improve scheduling and front desk efficiency, both in the methods you use to get patients on your schedule, and the technologies that can help avoid costly scheduling gaps or delays in care for patients when they arrive at your clinic.

Let Patients Self-schedule Online

A 2021 Experian Health survey² found that nearly three in four patients (73%) want to be able to schedule their own appointments online. The trend accelerated when patients discovered the convenience of self-scheduling as they booked appointments for COVID-19 vaccines.

One healthcare system in Great Falls, Montana³ opened online self-scheduling as an alternative to calling to schedule an appointment. They looked at data

showing that many patients who were placed on hold or couldn't make a call during the day to schedule appointments were delaying care. Almost immediately after launch, about 50% of patient appointments were booked online after regular call center hours.

In the Experian Health study, 93% of providers said patient experience is a top priority. Implementing tools that help patients schedule their own appointments at the time and place that is most convenient is a great way to start.

Offer More Telemedicine Appointments

You might not think that telemedicine is the answer to alleviate your scheduling challenges, but it can provide several benefits to providers and patients. One of the most significant benefits is the ability to

schedule more patients. Providers can fit in more appointments throughout the day, including adding on appointments before or after regular clinic hours without adding any overhead costs.

Telemedicine appointments are also convenient for patients who might not be able to get to a clinic for an

in-person appointment and would put off necessary care because they can't make it in person. Studies show that the average time someone spends on an in-person appointment—counting travel time and waiting time—is over two hours.⁴ Only 20 of those minutes are actually with the provider.

Schedule in Blocks

Successful practices find that scheduling in consecutive blocks can help providers maintain a busy schedule throughout the day. Instead of opening every appointment time throughout the day to any type of appointment, scheduling them in blocks can improve efficiency. For example, opening a block of in-person appointments between 10 a.m. and 12 p.m., then again from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. can help you fill the busiest time slots⁵ when people want to come for an appointment.

Early mornings and late afternoons are less popular times for people to come in person. Many people who work want to go into the office and get some work done prior to coming for an appointment. Others may not be able to get away in the late afternoon or have other school and family commitments that would be a problem for scheduling.

However, you can still fill your schedule by creating “blocks” of telemedicine appointments early and late in the day. These appointments eliminate travel time and waiting time in the clinic. The convenience could make people more willing to book the less popular times.

Clinics that open telemedicine time slots for early morning or late afternoon can also save money on overhead costs by having front desk and clinical staff come in later, since the providers won't need help greeting, checking in, and rooming patients for telemedicine visits. Or you can have staff work on other office tasks, such as answering patient questions in your patient portal or reviewing medication refill requests, while providers are conducting telemedicine appointments. A multi-tasking staff can help you eliminate some positions because your existing staff can handle additional workload.

Reduce
no-shows
using a
3-3-3
cadence⁷



Automate Your Appointment Reminders

Appointment reminders are one of the easiest ways to improve scheduling efficiency. Medical practices lose an estimated \$150 billion a year on scheduling inefficiencies.⁶ A significant part of this is no-show appointments. An estimated 5% to 30% of patients never show up for their appointment times, and that costs providers an average of \$200 per missed appointment.

To reduce no-shows, research shows clinics should send out appointment reminders on a 3-3-3 cadence⁷: three weeks before, three days before and three hours before the appointment is scheduled. However, many clinics still don't have an automated system to send out these reminders, which wastes a lot of staff time on the phone each day. Or clinics use automated phone call services that get screened for spam calls on many patients' cell phones.

Implement a Waitlist Hold to Fill Last-minute Openings

When patients need to cancel an appointment at the last minute, it costs providers a lot in missed revenue. With nationwide wait times extending for weeks, or even months, these last-minute schedule gaps are also costly to patients who need timely care.

In the 15 largest metro areas in the U.S., patients are waiting over 24 days⁹ on average to see a physician. In smaller markets, that increases to 32 days. In an MGMA survey, 61% of clinics said they are using a waiting list to fill last-minute appointments, but the process can be disjointed and difficult if you're doing it with spreadsheets or by hand. Automated systems that can identify when an appointment becomes available on

short notice and alert patients on the waiting list in priority order can help clinics stay full without taking up valuable staff time.

Automated reminders can simplify the entire process and help patients remember their appointments. These systems should include a patient's communication preferences of text message, email, or phone. However, research shows text messages are the most efficient and preferred way⁸ to communicate with patients. If you have electronic check-in for patients prior to their appointment, you can also use one of the reminders to send all their intake paperwork for them to fill out prior to arrival.



Use Electronic Check-in

Electronic check-in can streamline your process once patients arrive for their appointments. This can help you fit more patients into the day by reducing delays and bottlenecks. It also eliminates manual data entry by your staff, who are probably typing in the patient's information by hand, which can lead to data errors. Plus, it improves patient privacy by letting them fill out and correct any information in the patient record without announcing it to an entire waiting room of other people.

6 Time-saving Hacks for Your Healthcare Scheduling & Front Office Team

Let Patients Self-schedule Online | Offer More Telemedicine Appointments | Schedule in Blocks

Automate Your Appointment Reminders | Implement a Waitlist Hold to Fill Last-minute Openings | Use Electronic Check-in

GET
STARTED
NOW

Learn more about how to improve your scheduling and front office efficiency with AdvancedMD.

Schedule a demo¹⁰ to see all the tools available from AdvancedMD for online scheduling, automated appointment reminders, electronic check-in, and more. Add convenience for your patients and improve workflows and finances with our convenient solutions.

References

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