

Patient Experience Measures for Urgent Care



In order for your urgent care center to be successful in the long-run, you must provide an experience that patients will tell others about and seek to return for themselves.

In your own community you've probably seen restaurants that once thrived slowly go out of business. Most likely they didn't go down saying "we offer slow service, bad food, and an uncomfortable atmosphere," but instead they blamed external factors—the economy, competition, their landlord, or the labor market.

Without measures, it's difficult for business owners to really know what consumers want and whether they're delivering it on a consistent basis. That's why so many businesses invest in consumer surveys. Gathering data on a regular basis guides interventions, education and development.

Because "convenience" is the major consumer value proposition of urgent care—urgent care measures should evaluate ease of use including how quickly the center moves patients through while also considering the quality of the patient's service perceptions.

Four common urgent care evaluation measures focused on the patient experience include:

01 Average wait or throughput times.

Patients want to get in and out of urgent care quickly so wait times tend to be patients' most significant complaint regarding urgent care centers. "Wait time" is generally defined as the period that elapses between the patient's arrival at the center and when the patient is seen by the treating practitioner. Such can be measured by "timestamps" or "notations" in the practice management system, which can then be analyzed through reports. Wait times may also be measured by surveying the patient—however, most patient perceptions of wait are longer than the actual time waited. Because an urgent care encounter may include multiple intervals of wait—which can be difficult to measure—as a proxy many centers just look at total time in the center or "throughput time" with a goal of getting patients in-and-out in under an hour.

01 Percentage of patients seen within 30 minutes of arrival or percentage in-and-out in under an hour.

The problem with looking at average wait times is that averages fail to account for outliers. A center that has five minute waits on weekday afternoons but over an hour on weekends may feel it's doing well with average waits "under 30 minutes" but a high percentage of patients are likely unsatisfied with the length of their wait. Setting a benchmark patient experience—such as "seeing a provider within 30 minutes" or "door-to-door within 60 minutes"—and identifying the percentage of patients who fall within or outside that benchmark will provide more insight to the typical patient experience than looking at numerical averages alone.

01 Satisfaction with today's visit, likelihood to return, and likelihood to recommend.

Patient experience surveys often ask both "how satisfied are you with your most recent visit" as well as "how likely are you to recommend the urgent care center to others." Because satisfaction is somewhat objective—some patients will quickly indicate they're "Highly Satisfied" while others with similar experiences may say the visit only "Meets Expectations" because their criteria for "Highly Satisfied" may entail a truly extraordinary experience. Greater insight around patient satisfaction may be gained by asking whether a patient is likely to return to the center in the future if a similar need occurs. Significant to the urgent care operator is the distribution of responses.

To spur word-of-mouth—the urgent care operator needs to cultivate experiences "so special" that patients will want to tell others. Studies have shown that a patient's likelihood to recommend the center to friends, family, neighbors, co-workers and others is a strong indicator of the prevalence and quality of word-of-mouth—a key driver of urgent care visits.

Those who are satisfied with their urgent care experiences "promote" the practice. Using a scale of 0 to 10, patients who give 9's and 10's are considered "promoters," 7's and 8's are "neutral," and 0's to 6's are "detractors" who undermine the center's reputation through negative word-of-mouth. *For more information on Net Promoter Score, see: <https://practicevelocity.com/blog/episode-8-measuring-customer-service/>*

Surveys typically ask about the most recent visit because a patient may be satisfied with a center over the long run although unhappy with his last visit—asking about the most recent visit is a more accurate measure of service delivery.

Likelihood to return and to recommend are forward-looking measures. A patient may be dissatisfied with the most recent visit but sufficiently satisfied with his experiences over time that he or she would still utilize the center and recommend it to others.

01 Number and quality of online compliments and complaints.

Unfortunately, most patients who have negative experiences with urgent care will not tell the center's operator, but rather, will tell everyone they know including "virtual friends" online. The quantity and quality of reviews on sites like Google and Yelp determine who a center ranks in search engines when a prospective patient is looking for a center. Patients searching for an urgent care will also consider the number of "stars" and the quality of reviews for the center.

To increase the number and quality of online reviews, centers should ask patients to share their experiences on social media but never, under any circumstances, should a center pay for positive reviews. Patient complaints should be acknowledged by a manager or owner but due to HIPAA, the details should be addressed in follow-up outside of the Internet. Patients should be kept informed of remediation steps, and an invitation should be extended for the patient to return to the center for a better experience next time.

While the quote, “you get what you measure—so measure everything” may not be practical, it does underscore the need for a formal system of measuring what’s important to urgent care consumers. When providers and staff understand what urgent care patients want, are “bought in” to a culture that meets patient needs, and have been trained to use survey feedback to improve service delivery—the result will be increased loyalty and word-of-mouth.

This resource was first published prior to the 2019 merger between DocuTAP and Practice Velocity. The content reflects our legacy brands.

Stay Connected

Get the Urgent Care Minute Newsletter

Email



- [Solutions](#) >
- [Why Experity](#) >
- [Resources](#) >
- [Company](#) >

©2019 Experity Health. All rights reserved.

[Privacy](#) | [ONC Certification](#)