



Access Center Centralization & Technology Initiatives to Improve Access



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Access Center Centralization

Background:

Houston Methodist Physician Organization has over 1,500 specialty care physicians throughout the Houston metro area. Initially, many of these physicians operated individual call centers with no centralization across the system. This lack of coordination resulted in patient dissatisfaction due to heavy call volumes leading to delays in responding to patient's inquiries and concerns. Additional inefficiencies resulted from scheduling agents having to rely on personal knowledge and individual physician preferences with no unified guidelines shared across the system. To address these challenges, Houston Methodist System Access embarked on a program to consolidate individual call centers into Access Centers, along with the deployment of advanced technologies such as Decision Trees and Syllable AI.

Interventions:

Centralized Scheduling Platform: A unified scheduling system for all providers enabling agents to schedule appointments for any patient with any provider. This increases flexibility, reduces scheduling errors, and facilitates coordination across multiple providers thereby ensuring a smoother and more efficient scheduling process.

Centralized Analytics: A unified dashboard powered by Power BI to monitor key metrics such as call volume, response times, and service line performance. This tool provides real-time tracking allowing us to identify trends, address potential issues promptly, and enhance overall operational efficiency.

Deployment of Decision Trees: Integrated into our electronic medical record system, EPIC, Decision Trees standardize appointment scheduling across the hospital system for all providers. This also allows patients to schedule appointments online based on predefined scheduling rules ensuring consistency and accuracy in appointment management.

Syllable AI: A bot that operates on top of our IVR system automating a variety of tasks. Patients can schedule, reschedule, and confirm appointments, as well as request prescription refills, all through the AI bot without the need for agent intervention. This enhances patient convenience and streamlines workflows.

Single Point of Contact Streamlining Patient Interactions

Easy Access

One number for all needs. Simplified communication improves satisfaction.

Personalized Service

Dedicated agents provide tailored support. Patients feel valued and understood.

Faster Response

Reduced wait times enhance the patient journey. Timely assistance for quick resolutions.

Financial and Operational Benefits of Centralization

Reduced Costs

- Centralization reduced operational costs through resource optimization.

Increased Revenue

- Additional appointments increased revenue.

Improved Efficiency

- Streamlined processes led to better operational efficiency.

SPG Access Center Centralization Savings Calculations - Department of Medicine



Neurology: Efficiency and Appointment Growth

Neurology: Amplifying Appointment Volume

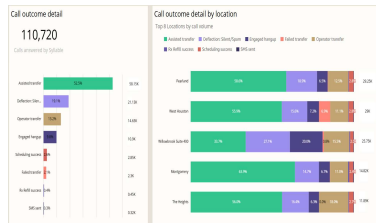


Department of Medicine: Call Handling Increase

Department of Medicine: A Paradigm Shift



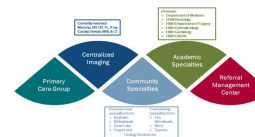
Syllable AI Performance



Implementation

Consolidating Access Centers:

- Started with clinics interested in having the access team manage their calls.
- Collaborated with clinical administration to assess current workflows, scheduler staffing, and call volumes.
- Conducted a comprehensive review of current phone trees, provider preferences, and scheduling workflows across clinics.
- Identified inefficiencies caused by clinic staff balancing patient care, check-in/check-out duties, and answering calls.
- Recognized areas for improvement to streamline operations and enhance efficiency.
- Transitioned scheduling agents to the central team and cross-trained them to handle calls for multiple clinics and specialties.
- Since initial implementation we have successfully transitioned over 60% of all practices with the goal of over 90% by the end of 2025.



Syllable AI:

- Began with the two clinics experiencing the highest patient referral volumes and expanded after seeing success.
- Analyzed call data, revealing a high volume of calls related to prescription refills.
- Found that schedulers were unable to directly manage these calls, leading to delays as messages were sent to clinics.
- Sought solutions to reduce call center workload and improve overall efficiency identifying Syllable as a potential solution.
- Integrated Syllable with the EMR system, allowing access to patient data and enabling self-service capabilities.
- Features like appointment scheduling, cancellations, rescheduling, prescription refills, and information retrieval were automated, reducing agent involvement.

Developing Scheduling Decision Trees & Online Scheduling Tools:

- Started with orthopedics, holding discovery sessions with providers and clinical staff to understand scheduling criteria.
- Collaborated with physicians to understand scheduling criteria and essential questions for categorizing specialty appointments.
- Standardized workflows and developed a streamlined, patient-friendly scheduling process combining data analysis, provider input, and technology solutions.
- Streamlined scheduling for both patients and staff, enhancing efficiency across specialties.
- Expanded the process to additional specialties, building decision trees for six specialties, imaging, and primary care.

Results

The results of our access center centralization have been significant. For the Department of Medicine, the percentage of calls handled by the central team increased from 35% to 84%, leading to an additional 9,000 appointments scheduled annually. Similarly, the centralization of the Neurology access center resulted in an 11% increase in the number of calls handled, translating to over 1,000 additional appointments scheduled each year.

The Syllable pilot yielded impressive outcomes, with an 18.6% reduction in call volume within the first three months of implementation, streamlining operations and reducing the need for live agent involvement.

Scheduling decision trees have also proven effective, leading to a reduction in scheduling errors and improving patient experience. Additionally, specialty new patient online scheduling now accounts for 24% of appointments—a 50% increase from 2023. This growth in online scheduling is further enhancing patient access and convenience. Overall, these initiatives have streamlined our scheduling process, reduced administrative burden, and improved both patient and staff satisfaction across our clinics.