



Tips for Balancing Demand and Supply

If a practice or individual suspects that demand exceeds supply, there are a number of metrics to look at to make that determination.

TNA: if the delay for third next available appointment is lengthening, this is evidence that demand is starting to exceed supply. However, keep in mind that if there are multiple appointment types, these types compete for capacity or space on the schedule and the lengthening of the delay for one appointment type can indicate a restriction on that appointment type relative to the competing appointment types. This relative restriction can optimize the delays for the other appointment types but lengthen the restricted appointment type wait. If TNA is stable, this strongly implies that demand and supply (or at least activity) are balanced.

DSA: this data should demonstrate the ratio and relationship between three critical metrics – demand, supply and activity. If demand exceeds either supply or activity then the TNA should lengthen. Keep in mind that no shows are measured as demand since demand is measured on the day the work is generated. If demand and activity both exceed supply then there is risk of impending burnout. This measure can also indicate whether demand is rising over time.

Return Visit Rate or Revisit Interval: these measures both show – in different ways - how often patients return and, as such, contribute to demand (demand = patients X visits per time frame). Keep in mind that return visit rate is an average and that seeing the range or distribution of just how often patients return is valuable as well. Reduction of return rates is accomplished by focusing on the high end of the visit rate distribution, not on the low end.

Panel Size: this measure is a prime contributor to understanding demand. Demand arises from panel. Demand is the product of panel X visit rate. Look at panel monthly in order to see net growth or loss. Independently looking at the rate of new patients is helpful as well since new patients take more work and utilize more appointments early in their course.

Supply or Clinical FTE: while practices ought to be able to see supply loss in the DSA data, it is helpful to view this independently. Supply loss can occur if the appointment time is lengthened, more “short” appointments are merged into “long appointments,” providers leave the practice, providers change their work time status, or more non-clinical time is subtracted from clinical time. This last issue can be hidden and can be insidious.

Understanding the balance of supply and demand in our practices is critical to improving access. Our goal is to match supply to demand daily in order to delight our patients and to best manage our own workflow. Following is a list of critical steps to achieving this:

1. Measure daily demand by day of the week for each provider in the practice.

2. Calculate supply based on normal schedule templates, for each provider, each day of the week.
3. Deploy supply based on the patterns in your demand data. This may prompt changing provider schedules or rearranging other duties to optimize the daily match of demand and supply.
4. Monitor your demand and supply match. If done in advance, corrections can be made in advance.
5. On a day when demand unexpectedly exceeds supply, there are really only three options:
 - Delay or defer some of the demand to a future date (more backlog)
 - Work harder that day
 - Approach the work differently (e.g. use the team, or handle the work in a way other than an appointment)

Decide in advance how you will deal with these days. Consider contingency planning as a tool for this.

6. Remember that the patient is the ultimate customer. Avoid over-directing patients to particular days and times. Experience shows that patients will come in on the day and time that works best for them. It is better, initially, to observe demand, let it flow freely and understand its variation by day of the week. This will put you in the best position to build a schedule that responds to what your patients want, and to be able to manage each day's work as it comes. Ultimately, this is less work for the practice
7. Consider avoiding booking return visits on high-demand days such as Mondays and the day after holidays. This can assist you in smoothing out demand more evenly.