



Patients are forgiving when doctors rush a visit

By James Furbush | November 22, 2017

Patients notice when a doctor is rushing through an appointment, but the hastiness doesn't affect their overall satisfaction with their care encounter, according to data from athenahealth.

The surprising finding suggests that doctors can bolster their productivity without jeopardizing their patients' perception of their office visit – as long as the patients don't have a long wait to be seen in the first place.


The finding comes from an athenahealth study that used data from 200,000 patient surveys issued by MedStatix to physicians on the athenahealth network. The research team used Medicaid's work relative value units (RVUs) to measure the productivity of doctors and then examined the doctors' MedStatix patient-survey results.

Researchers discovered that patients seen by busy doctors – those who generated a relatively large number of RVUs every day – were much more

likely to report that they weren't satisfied with the amount of time that their doctor spent with them during their visit. But, when patients were asked about overall satisfaction with their providers, the most productive doctors did not receive significantly lower scores. Likewise, patients of the most productive doctors were only one percent more likely to avoid recommending them than patients of less busy providers.

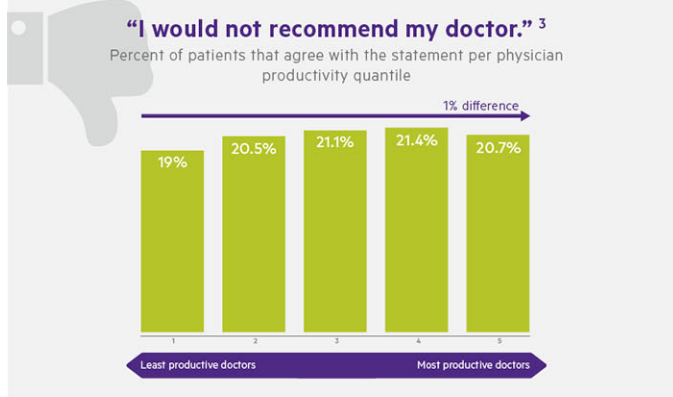
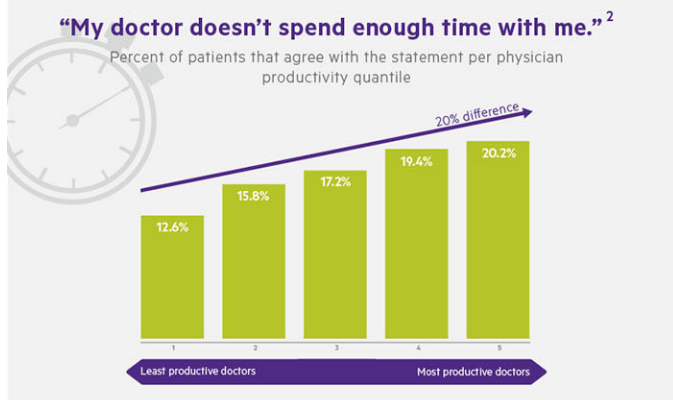
A couple of explanations might account for these discrepancies, says Josh Gray, vice president of research at athenahealth. "On one hand, maybe patients understand that their providers are busy and don't hold it against them – they ascribe the lack of time to a fundamental problem with healthcare, not a shortcoming of the provider," he says. "Another possibility is that providers have built up enough good will with their patients that the patients are willing to ignore minor problems like not spending enough time."

Gray warned there is one exception: Researchers found that an increase in wait time did correlate with reduced satisfaction. "Wait times are one area where patients don't seem to be very forgiving," he says.




Productive providers and satisfied patients

We asked thousands of patients if they felt rushed when visiting their doctors. Patients of more productive doctors were more likely to feel rushed.¹ However, this did not impact patient satisfaction.



¹Least – highest provider productivity (ranked in 5 quintiles by work relative value units (RVUs) per day. The least productive providers saw less than 15 work RVUs per full day, whereas the most productive saw more than 40.
²Question Text: (How would you rate your doctor on) spending as much time with you as you feel you need?
³Question Text: Using a scale from 0 to 10, how likely would you be to recommend (your doctor) to others?
 Source: athenahealth & Medidata
 Sample: 45,000 survey responses from visits to 2,300 primary care physicians



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