

# The doctor will see you ... sometime

By Chris Hayhurst | December 11, 2017

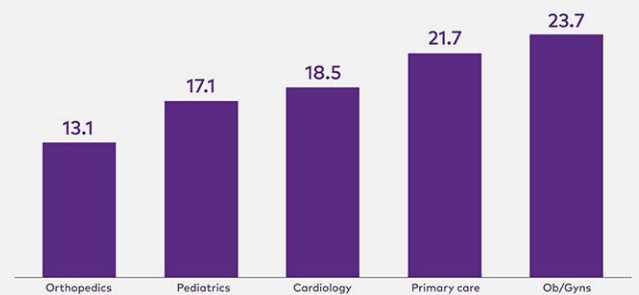
**W**hen new patients request an appointment, how long must they wait to be seen? The answer, according to new data from athenahealth, varies by their doctor's specialty – sometimes significantly so.

Looking at data from 4.2 million first appointments scheduled in 2016 with 13,000 providers, athenahealth researchers found that new patients – those who had not visited the practice in at least three years – wait an average of 2.7 weeks after calling for their first appointment.

Across providers – including primary care physicians, orthopedists, pediatricians, cardiologists, and ob/gyns – 10 percent of new patients were seen the same day, 60 percent were scheduled within two weeks, and 20 percent waited more than four weeks for their first appointment.

## Long wait times for Ob/Gyns

Average wait time for new patients' first appointment, in days

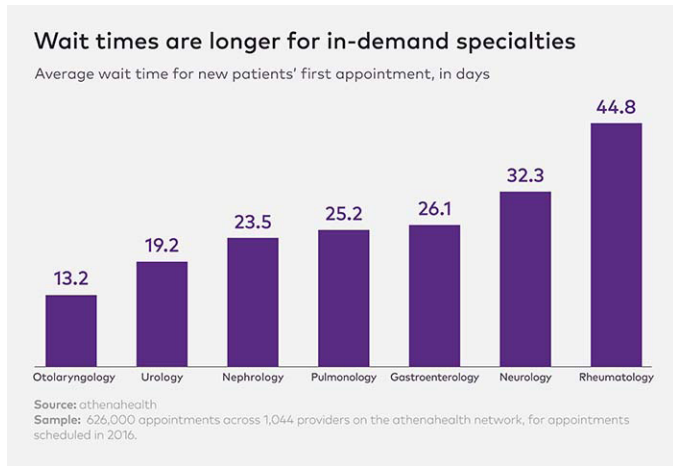


Source: athenahealth

Sample: 4.2 million appointments across 13,000 providers on the athenahealth network, for appointments scheduled in 2016. New patients are defined as patients who have not visited the practice in the last 3 years.

Of that group of providers, orthopedic patients were seen the fastest, the data show, with an average appointment lead time of 13 days. At the other end of the spectrum, ob/gyn patients waited almost 24 days, on average – two days longer than those scheduling primary care visits and about a week longer than pediatric patients.

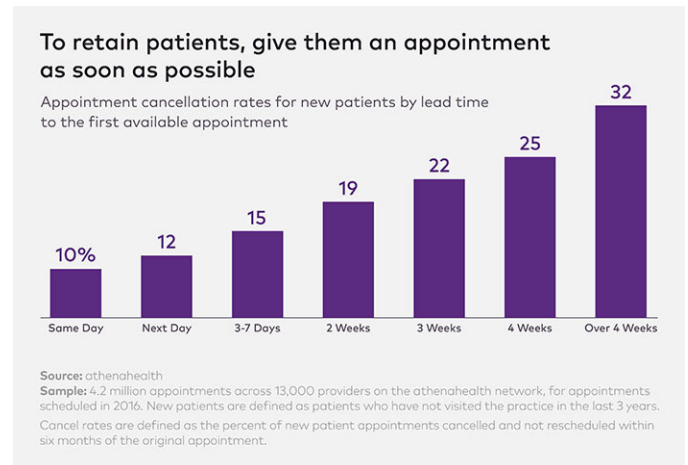
Research shows that wait times for first appointments are likely to be longer for in-demand specialties, including otolaryngology, urology, nephrology, pulmonary, gastroenterology, neurology, and rheumatology.



Among that group, which logged 626,000 new-patient appointments in 2016 across 1,044 providers on the athena network, patients seeking an appointment with a rheumatologist had to wait the longest: 44 days to first appointment. Neurology patients waited 32 days and gastroenterology patients 26 days.

Why does wait time matter? Appointment availability drives patient retention, says Josh Gray, athenahealth's vice president of research. "Our research shows new patients who wait more than a month for their first appointment are twice as likely

to cancel – and never return – as patients scheduled within a week," he says.



*Chris Hayhurst is a writer based in Northampton, Massachusetts.*



A daily news hub reporting from the heart of the health care internet, with access to a comprehensive data set of health care transactions from athenahealth's nationwide network. We equip leaders with actionable insight and inspiration for making health care work as it should.

## Stay in the know

Sign up for weekly data and news:  
[insight.athenahealth.com/newsletter-signup](https://insight.athenahealth.com/newsletter-signup)