



Restrictions on “Physicals”

Question:

A couple of doctors were concerned with becoming "overloaded" with annual physicals/check ups on any given day. The most they would feel comfortable doing would be two or three per day. The worry is that they may end up with eight in a day, which would be unlikely, but still a remote possibility. Would the system of same day bookings still work if there was a restriction on the number of check ups per day?

Answer:

This work is all about demand for service and supply of service. A mismatch of demand and supply, either permanent or temporary, will create a delay. If the demand is for two checkups a day, and at 9 am and 3 pm each day there is room for a check-up, then we have no problem. On the other hand, if demand is greater than two per day each and every day, we will get a delay and a backlog and one that will never get better. If the demand varies or more importantly the supply varies (some days there is no supply if the doctor is gone) then that fluctuation or variation in either demand or supply will result in a wait time. All waits are bad. Waits are bad because they increase the re-work and redundancy, they lead to higher no shows, they create the need for resources to “triage,” and because they lead to adverse clinical care and outcome.

So if we artificially fix or restrict the supply of check ups, and demand continues, or if we restrict supply of check ups and there is variation, then we will get delays for these services. When we restrict any appointment type, we are guessing that the restricted number is equal to the demand for that type. If we guess low and there is more demand than the restricted supply, then the wait just gets worse. If we guess low and there is less demand than the restricted supply, we end up with unused appointment capacity.

This is a choice: if we choose to limit or restrict any clinical service, and if the demand outstrips our restricted supply, then we will get an ever expanding delay, or if there is any variation in either daily demand or daily supply then waits will slowly accumulate. So we can choose a predictable day for us and create unpredictable waits for customers or choose predictable service level for customers and learn how to deal with the variation.

To deal with the variation, we have to learn what makes these specific visits more difficult, flow map the process and work toward improvement at the visit.