The doctor can see you now

A hospital system's new physical environment innovations
Houston Methodist Hospital System, Texas

Houston Methodist is a hospital system comprising of eight hospitals. On May 1st restrictions on elective (non-urgent) cases were lifted and staff began to plan for how they could achieve their set aim of achieving 50% of their pre-COVID-19 baseline (figures from early March) within the first week.

Whilst maintaining 15% of beds for COVID-19 patients (as mandated), by the week of May 27th to June 2nd, the system's surgical volume was 88% of baseline, procedural volume was 77% of baseline and imagining volume was 75% of baseline.

Changing the physical environment was a key component to this success.
New measures to control the physical environment

To help maintain a safe environment for both patients and staff two new measures focused on hospital environment were introduced:

- Virtual waiting rooms
- Adjustment to appointment scheduling

**Virtual waiting rooms**
The system updated and expanded their secure patient communication platform used to text patients. The new process is:

1. The patients can text clinics when they arrive at the hospital
2. When ready, the clinic will text the patient telling them it is time for them to enter
3. The patient can be escorted straight to the appropriate exam room, limiting time in the physical waiting room

**In the past month, this technology was used for nearly 10,000 appointments across more than 30 clinics**

**Appointment scheduling**
To limit the number of patients in the clinic and the amount of time lost due to more extensive cleaning needed between appointments, a staggered appointment system was launched. Now virtual appointments are phased with in-person visits. This allows some staff to see face-to-face patients whilst others in the same clinic see telemedicine visits simultaneously. Additionally extended appointment hours have been introduced to help accessibility for all. These measures limit the risk of infection and contamination on-site.

Collected anecdotes from patients show that patients appreciate these measures which both maintain access and safety.

How are you managing your physical environment? Let us know by emailing hcis.access-qii@nhs.net

You can read about their full experience in this published paper