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# The doctor can see you now

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A hospital system's new  
physical environment  
innovations



# Physical Environment during COVID-19

A key challenge facing organisations as they resume elective care services is how they will accommodate physical distancing restrictions to ensure staff and patient safety.

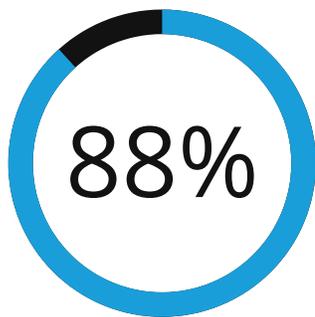
*Social distancing was never planned in hospital or ambulatory care design*



## 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.

Surgical volume



77%

Procedural volume

Imaging volume

75%

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 imaging 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

*Allows a fraction of the providers within the same clinic to see face-to-face patients while the other providers in that clinic see telemedicine visits at that same time. This helps to control traffic into our clinics, without reducing access*



*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-qi@nhs.net](mailto:hcis.access-qi@nhs.net)

You can read about their full experience in this [published paper](#)