Objective: Across the country, high demand for neurological services combined with limited access to neurologists has resulted in significant patient wait times and provider burnout. Mayo Clinic in Arizona has been particularly focused on ensuring patients needing specialized neurological services have timely appointment access. The objectives of the High Throughput Autonomic Clinic is to: 1) improve patient access 2) reduce the time between initial evaluation and the establishment of a treatment plan 3) and leverage the team-based model to provide more timely and efficient longitudinal care. The autonomic team, which consists of one physician, two advanced practitioners, two nurses, one licensed practical nurse, and a secretary, identified three challenges negatively impacting patient appointment access: limited providers within this subspecialty, inefficiencies in clinical appointments, and patients desiring follow-up exclusively with the physicians.

Planning Methods: Traditionally, a patient would meet with the physician with no pre-assessment and limited team-based care processes, thus decreasing the value of that initial visit. In an effort to develop an innovative solution to improve access and provide more efficient and timely care, the autonomic team proposed the creation of a multi-provider clinic that would increase patient access while ensuring new patients had the opportunity to meet with the physician and receive valuable education from nursing. The team determined essential patient information prior to a visit, thereby creating a robust, pre-visit triage process and pre-schedule autonomic and other diagnostic testing. Simultaneously, administrative leadership worked to create clinic templates that could accommodate the additional patient volumes. Most importantly, the team met to talk through patient selection and process flows.

Implementation Methods: All team members played a critical role in the implementation of the new clinic. Prior to scheduling patients, the nurse reviewed the patient appointment request to identify appropriateness and schedule necessary testing following the initial appointment. Once patients were identified, the medical practice secretary scheduled the patient for a 2.5 hour block of time and prepped them for a follow-up call with the nurse to review and document past medical history, allergies, results of prior diagnostic evaluations, and medications. This information was documented in the medical record. This pre-visit information allowed physician and advanced practitioner providers to be better prepared for the visit and reduced the clerical burden following the visit. Patients were scheduled in groups of five and roomed in groups of 2 to 3. Patients who saw the advanced practitioner first, would then visit with the physician to discuss diagnosis and review the treatment plan. The nurse would conclude the visit by providing education for longitudinal care and post-visit expectations. In the High Throughput Clinic the pre-visit activity is essential to optimizing the appointment and achieving success.

Results: The High Throughput Clinic has been tremendously successful. The new clinic model increased patient appointment access by 300%. Our team completed surveys for 70% of the patients who participated in clinic and 94% would recommend the provider to a friend or family member. 87.5% of patients surveyed were satisfied with their visit and felt they received very good or excellent service from the staff. Patient feedback has been exceptionally positive on the timeliness of receiving an appointment and 87.5% said they were satisfied with their visit. According to the clinicians, the efficient use of clinical time is the paramount benefit of the High Throughput Clinic. Patients present with preliminary questions and medications verified which allows the provider to focus primarily on the patient and their clinical issues, through a reduction in non-essential documentation and clerical duties. The physician in particular mentioned that the efficient use of time to focus on the current issue increases provider satisfaction and decreases the time spent on burdensome clerical responsibilities.

Future Steps: Selecting patients for the High Throughput Clinic is currently a manual process performed by the care team based on the limited detail provided in the patient record or appointment request. To enhance efficiency, the team looks to define criteria that can be assessed by a scheduling representative to automate the patient selection process. In the initial phase, patient selection focused on local patients who could readily present for an appointment. Our team would like to expand to long distance patients which would require additional patient coordination to ensure their testing can be accommodated during the specified visit.

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