

Appointment vs. Walk-In

Determining the method by which your patients will be seen in your clinic is a significant piece of operational planning. The planning team will determine whether patients will be seen by appointment or on a walk-in basis.

Decision factors may include the following:

- Staff resources (paid or unpaid)
- Clinic location and size
- Days/times clinic will be open
- Patient capacity
- Degree of comfort with chaos
- Costs
- Time constraints

One way to begin to sort out these issues is to rely on the Pros and Cons Method of exploration.

Pros and Cons Method example:

Patients Seen by Appointment Only	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff have a general idea of what to expect each session• Number of patients served can be projected• Patients can be screened for eligibility and needs before coming to clinic• Staff have a fairly predictable time in which they will finish clinic session• Patients know a time has been set aside specifically for them• Patients have time to plan for child care and transportation• Number of patients in the clinic at any one time can be controlled in order to best manage available space	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Plan altered by no-shows• Projections (and resources) impacted by no-shows• Some patients have no phone or reliable address for reminder calls or postcards• Staff needed to answer phone, set appointments, return calls, determine patient eligibility and manage schedule• Staff must remain flexible when clinic session goes longer than anticipated• Patients feel challenged when not seen at their scheduled time• Appointments not always available when patient has an acute need

Regardless of how your clinic chooses to manage the patients who come through your doors, the values that were established by your Planning Team will go a long way in setting the tone for how patients will be treated in all aspects of clinic operations. Whether dealing with patients who are requesting an appointment after several no-shows or dealing with a patient who has entered the door after capacity was reached for the clinic session, your values around compassion and service will influence the outlook of the interaction.

Patients Seen on Walk-in Basis	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patients come to clinic when they have need and transportation • Able to estimate number of patients served based on historical data • “No-Shows” not a factor • Clinic may operate with value of “everyone will be served” in some capacity • No need to manage patient scheduling • Patients understand the nature of a walk-in service • Patients may perceive this as a “fair system” as everyone has an equal chance of being seen • May see larger number of patients in any given clinic session versus appointment system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding that there is no predictability to number of patients • Not always able to predict the length of time needed to see patients • Processes or protocols may be subject to change based on situation • Number of patients seeking care more variable due to weather, holidays, etc. • Patients not screened before clinic may not be eligible for clinic services and will need to be turned away/referred elsewhere • Staff are challenged by their desire to not turn patients away • Patients may begin arriving hours before the clinic opens to secure a spot • No predicting of necessary resources based upon anticipated patients and needs