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Peer reviewed

Patient perception of delays in the dermatology clinic

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To the Editor:

Patient satisfaction within dermatology practice is influenced by numerous factors including appointment accessibility, visit length, physician traits, unique aspects of a dermatologic consultation, and patient delays [1-5]. Notably, patient satisfaction negatively correlates with wait times, which are measured as the time patients spend in waiting areas and examination rooms before seeing a doctor [1-7]. Research suggests that patient satisfaction is more closely related to the perception of wait times rather than the actual wait times [4]. Although studies have shown that informing patients of delays can improve satisfaction, there is a lack of research focused on dermatology clinics [5,7]. To address this gap, we conducted a study to better understand dermatology patients' perceptions of delays and to determine their preferred methods of being informed about delays.

To assess patient satisfaction with wait times within a dermatology clinic, an anonymous post-visit survey was administered to patients at an academic medical center-affiliated dermatology clinic (Table 1). The survey was conducted at a single urban site with patients aged 18 and older. This study was determined to be IRB exempted. At the time of the survey, there was no standard protocol for informing patients of delays.

Our findings showed that 92.5% (37/40) of patients arrived on time (defined as prior to or within 5 minutes of the scheduled appointment time), and 95% (38/40) waited less than or equal to 30 minutes in the waiting room (Table 1). Within 15 minutes, 34 patients were roomed, and four patients were roomed within 15 to 30 minutes. Only one patient roomed within 15 minutes, and one patient roomed between 15 to 30 minutes perceived there to be a delay (Figure 1). Thus, 94.7% (36/38) of patients who were roomed within 30 minutes of arrival did not perceive a delay in the patient rooming process.

Hence, the majority of patients did not perceive a delay in the rooming process, with 94.7% (36/38) of those roomed within 30 minutes not perceiving a delay. Out of all respondents, 37.5% (15/40) noted that the front desk verbally indicated a potential delay, and 32.5% (13/40) of respondents noticed office signs providing information on delay policies. Of the two patients who reported a delay, one was not informed of a delay.

Once patients arrived in the examination room, 95% (38/40) of patients were seen by a healthcare provider within 15 minutes once in the examination room. Two patients waited up to 30 minutes until they were seen in the examination room. 95% (38/40) of patients did not perceive any time spent alone in the examination room as an appointment delay.

Regarding preferred methods of communication, 62.5% (25/40) of patients preferred to be informed of delays via text message or verbally by staff. Email (15%) and signs (12.5%) were less popular options (Figure 2).

Our study suggests that patients generally do not perceive wait times of up to 30 minutes or time spent in examination rooms (up to 15 minutes) as delays; 95% of our patients were seen by a provider within 15 minutes of being roomed. When delays occur, personalized communication methods such as text messages or verbal notifications are preferred. These findings can improve patient-centered care in dermatology clinics and other high-volume medical practices.

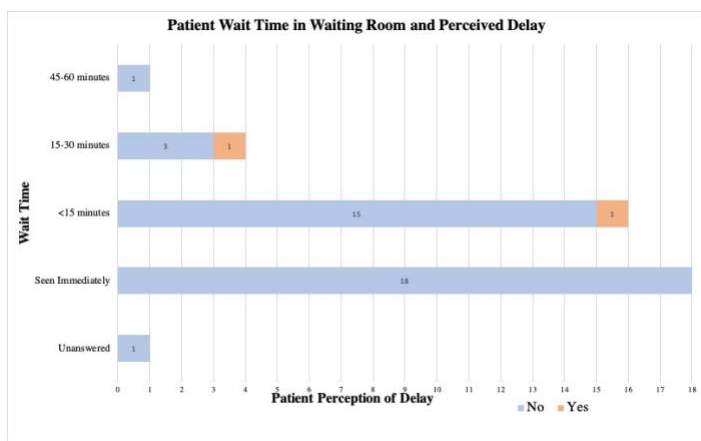


Figure 1. Patient wait time in the waiting room and perceived delay.

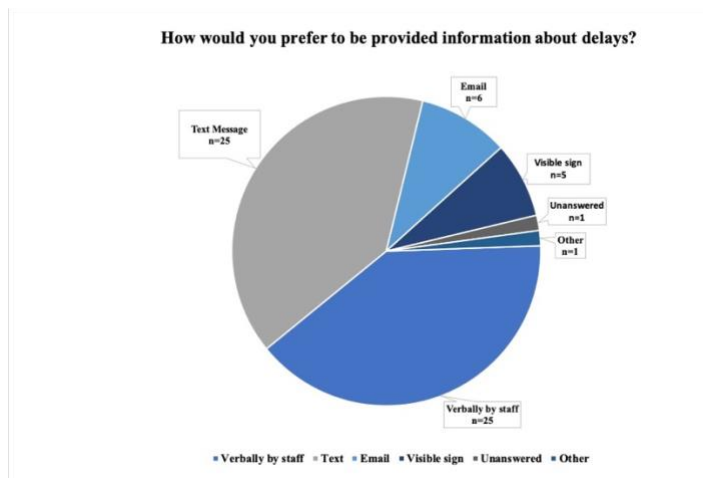


Figure 2. How would patients prefer to be informed about appointment delays?

Potential conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Table 1. *Post-Visit Survey*

Question number	Question	Potential responses
1.	<i>Did you arrive to clinic on time (prior to or within 5 minutes of your appointment time)?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No
2.	<i>How long was your wait time in the waiting room?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seen immediately • <15 minutes • 15-30 minutes • 30-45 minutes • 45-60 minutes • >60 minutes
3.	<i>In your opinion, was this a delay?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No
4.	<i>Did the front desk provide you with information about delays verbally?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No
5.	<i>Was a sign that provided you with information about delays?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No
6.	<i>Once in the examination room, how long was the wait time until a resident, doctor, or nurse practitioner came into the room?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seen immediately • <15 minutes • 15-30 minutes • 30-45 minutes • 45-60 minutes

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • >60 minutes
7.	<i>In your opinion, was this a delay?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No
8.	<i>Did the person who walked you to the examination room provide you with information about delays to see the resident, doctor, or nurse practitioner?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No
9.	<i>In your opinion, were you informed of your appointment delay in a way that made you feel valued? (On a scale from 1-5, with 1 feeling not valued and 5 feeling very valued)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 • 2 • 3 • 4 • 5
10.	<i>How would you prefer to be provided information about delays? (check all that apply)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text • Email • Verbally by staff • Visible sign • Other:___
	<i>Any additional comments or feedback regarding notifications of delays in our office:</i>	