

Waiting Time at Vermont Health Care

The practice is aware of the difficulties experienced by patients because of extended waiting times. We are attempting to improve this situation but also require your help. Medicine has become more complex, like most disciplines, with additional demands for accurate documentation, computerization and bureaucratic requirements on both doctor and patient.

Our standard appointment time, which is longer than in many centres, is 15 minutes. Of this time 3-4 minutes is typically required for documentation or prescriptin authorisation and other bureaucratic tasks. This leaves 11-12 minutes to deal with the problems of our patients. We feel that if this is understood it may help our patients to be realistic about the scope of issues that can be satisfactorily addressed in this time.

Several common situations cause delay:

A patient has a number of small problems, which are dealt with before a major larger issue is mentioned. The larger issue is often more immediate so that the doctor is committed to working through this even though the time allotted has been used on the earlier minor problems. Complaints such as chest pains and eye / vision difficulties / bleeding should always be addressed early in the consultation.

Appointments are often made for follow up or review. Holding off acute problems to be handled at the same time as an already arranged appointment can often mean that there is insufficient time for the planned review or for the new problem; or the appointment is extended, delaying the following appointments.

There are more and more demands on patients for medical reports or forms to be completed. Patients often plan to leave these with the doctor to avoid delays in consultation. However, form completion has become such a large component of our work that it cannot be put aside until the "end of the day" when we "have time". Therefore, sufficient appointment time needs to be made to allow forms or reports to be completed in addition to whatever other consultation is required.

Because of privacy constraints, receptionists cannot check if the appointment time made is appropriate for the needs of the patient. Therefore it is important that our patients have an understanding of the time they need to book.

For completion of any medical report a double appointment is usually required especially if there is also a need for a consultation for a separate problem. Travel vaccination queries, medical examinations for insurance or work, smear tests and multiple problems generally require a long appointment.

We do try to leave time for emergencies and phone calls etc but do not have control over these. Inevitably they occur in runs and not at the allotted time.

We appreciate your understanding on these occasions and will continue to try and improve our systems to minimize waiting times.