

## Health Information Compliance Alert

### Reader Question: Utilize Practice Analytics to Streamline Day-to-Day Operations

Help your office run more efficiently with these 3 steps.

**Question:** We're trying to standardize all of our practice's processes to make our operations more efficient. What's the best way to handle this big job?

Pennsylvania subscriber

**Answer:** One of the surest ways to analyze and redesign your practice's processes is a technique called value stream mapping. This method, used across many different industries, helps you to identify and eliminate wasted time and resources in your current system. The end result can be a leaner, more efficient practice for both you and your patients.

You can improve any process within your office using value stream mapping. "The key is to document the entire process by identifying each step and the times associated with them," says **Sam Goldberger, MD, MBA** in his book *A Method That Works*. Once you've chosen a process to assess, follow these simple steps:

**1. Document the Current Process.** Draw every step in a patient's experience at your office, with a graphical box for each step. That includes every time they speak to a person, every time they sit and wait, and every time they undergo a procedure. Identify how long each step takes at your office now.

**2. Notice and Eliminate Any Wasted Steps.** Can you eliminate any of the current steps? Do the patients need to speak with all the people in the mapped process? Are they waiting unnecessarily at any point?

**3. Decide on an Ideal Time for Each Step.** If one of the steps is currently taking longer than you think it should, you can look at ways to shrink that time. If you see dead waiting time built into one of the steps, you can reduce that time. As part of this step, "I also like to list dependencies beneath each process point, such as how many techs we have, how behind we are in seeing patients, and the limit of exam rooms we might have that will affect how long patients will end up waiting," notes Dr. Goldberger.

Getting accurate data is essential to value streaming. Never just assume that your estimates are correct. For example, use a tracking system to measure exactly how long the doctor spends with each patient for different types of exams. This could mean using a low-tech tracking sheet, using your EHR system to track times, or even hiring a temp to record information over a fixed period.

Once you've collected accurate exam time, you can value stream map much more precisely.

When you know exactly what patients are doing at each step and how long each of those steps is taking, you can reduce inefficiencies and annoyances, and provide a much smoother flow through the visit. Value stream mapping is a great way to make that happen.