Qmatic Success Story
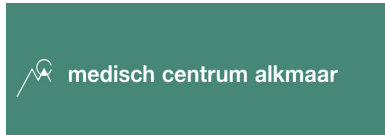Medisch Centrum Alkmaar (MCA)
Healthcare sector

Dutch hospitals show respect for patients' time with real-time Qmatic solution

medisch centrum alkmaar

In the North Holland province, test labs in two hospitals – Gemini Ziekenhuis and Medisch Centrum Alkmaar (MCA) – introduced a solution that improves patient satisfaction and enables clinics to have better control of their operations.

👥 THE SITUATION

Together, Gemini Ziekenhuis, in Den Helder, and MCA, in Alkmaar, form the MCA Gemini Groep. MCA is the larger, more specialised hospital; it employs about 3,000 and serves about 600,000 residents. Gemini Ziekenhuis employs about 1,000.

Both hospitals had a test lab; patients are sent there for urine and blood tests. Patients could not make appointments. Doctors and nurses referred them to the labs when the patients were in various workup and diagno-sis stages. So patients went to the labs when tests must be run. Each lab received about 250 patients daily. Patient load varied exten-sively during the week as did the types of tests that were run.

This lead to several problems: long waits for patients and difficulties in planning lab operations – particularly staffing. "I envisioned that we would create a lab operation, which required a minimal amount of patients' time," says MCA's Head of Laboratories Hans van Pelt, who's behind the operation's reengineering. "At the same time, we'd more optimally staff the lab in terms of sheer numbers of employees and necessary skill sets."

A few years ago, lab waiting times were long, and waiting lines were quite chaotic. There was only one line and no way for patients with urgent matters to shorten their wait. Types of tests made no difference.

Some tests required patients to fill out forms with personal information before tests were run. Other tests didn't require this information in advance. The result was a messy, unstructured, slow wait; many patients simply got tired of waiting and went home rather than going through with the tests, which in many cases were important for diagnosis and treat-ment.

💙 THE SOLUTION

Reduction of waiting time by 90%

When patients arrive, they can now choose among five services from an interactive self service kiosk.
Patients get a number slip that specifies their place in the serving process and a code that indicates the types of

tests that should be run. Gender is displayed on large screens.

"Patients, who must submit simple urine samples, typically have less patience with long waits – compared to persons whose blood is collected for extensive workups," van Pelt explains. "So we can use information from patients' selections when they take their numbers to quickly prioritise ways in which varying cases should be managed."

In general, MCA Gemini Groep staff decided that a test should take no longer than 20 minutes after a patient has requested service. Ideally, an urgent case should take no more than 15 minutes.

Well-prepared staff members greet patients when they enter the lab area. Nurses already know which tests should be administered and get right to work. This streamlines the entire intake process. "Information we receive on all patients – starting with when they take a number and indicate the purpose of their visits – gives us a bird's eye view of the entire process," say van Pelt. "We get real-time signals when the wait will be too long, so we can rapidly deploy additional resources. As mentioned, a normal test can't take more than 20 minutes and within that time span, 10 minutes is an acceptable waiting time before actual testing starts. When 21 minutes have passed and a patient has not received help, then the system transmits a computer alert into the lab so that more staff can be added.

The system in use within the MCA Gemini Groep provides input for long-term planning. Historical data is used to detect patient-load patterns and thus provide management with valuable decision-support information.

"We see how patient load varies across the work week with larger patient pressure earlier in the week, and we can also see variations across the year," says van Pelt.

⭐ THE RESULTS

"Basically, patients and employees accepted the new processes extremely well," says van Pelt. "We have

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continuously evaluated the solutions and adjusted as necessary. About 95% of our patients like the new technology – buttons, displays, and number slips – which is quite different from what they're used to. A survey of about 130 patients ranked the service as 4.2 on a 5-point scale. Employees are also much happier now."

👍 OVERVIEW OF THE SOLUTION

MCA
Gemini Ziekenhuis and Medisch Centrum Alkmaar (MCA) are two hospitals in the North Holland province of the Netherlands. Together, they form the MCA Gemini Groep

Area: Healthcare
Region: The Netherlands

The challenges
- Chaotic waiting line situation in lab clinics.
- Difficult to tailor service to varying customer demands.
- Difficult to get input for staff planning for different kinds of tests.

The solutions
- Qmatic Solo and Management Portal.

- System with tickets in conjunction with ability for patients to select what lab tests must be done.
- Digital signage system for patients; the signs indicate their place in line and call them when it's time for them to step forward – in conjunction with nurses calling patients in some cases.
- Statistics and real-time alerts for management and staff.

The advantages

- Improved patient experience
- Reduced waiting time
- Optimised staff scheduling
- Better work environment for staff