HENRY J. AUSTIN HEALTH CENTER

Health center revamps patient access to better care for its community

As a Federally Qualified Health Center, the Henry J. Austin Health Center puts a premium on access to care.

"Our top priority is to create an open access system that's flexible, so we can schedule patients for same-day appointments when needed," says Kemi Alli, MD, who is CEO of the private, nonprofit health center in Trenton, New Jersey. HJAHC provides affordable, culturally sensitive primary care to a largely uninsured and medically underserved population.

HJAHC's 30+ providers – physicians, nurse practitioners, and dentists – wanted to make sure their patients could always get a timely appointment. At the same time, every provider wants to see a workable mix of patients. "You don't want 20 new patients in day," says Dr. Alli, "you want three." Community demand for affordable care is high, so it's critical for HJAHC to optimize utilization.

For many years, call center workers had to remember provider schedules, specializations and preferences to make the best matches between patients and providers. "Clinicians didn't always get the scheduling they wanted, so there was friction between clinical staff and the call center staff," Dr. Alli says.

The health center sought a better solution for its patient population

In 2017, Dr. Alli and her colleagues evaluated new patient scheduling systems. "We wanted flexibility, and we wanted to do away with the need for schedulers to keep rules in their heads," says Dr. Alli. "We were looking for seamless integration with our EHR, and we needed to give the call center staff the tools to work efficiently."

The practice leaders' search led them to a solution that offered the intelligence and agility to meet the needs of HJAHC's patients and providers.

"DASH is flexible in that it allows many different kinds of rules and distills them into the booking engine," says Dr. Alli. "You can specify all different kinds of provider preferences regarding time of day, day of week, which insurance the provider takes, and so on." Almost as important, "the interface is very user-friendly," says Dr. Alli. "You don't have to click on a lot of buttons."

"DASH has flexibility, ease of use, and the ability to use the no-show rule to increase capacity utilization."

Kemi Alli, MD
Chief Executive Officer
Henry J. Austin Health Center

Better optimized scheduling means more timely care for vulnerable patients

Now HJAHC can better match patients to the right level of provider, whether it's a physician assistant, nurse practitioner or physician. Providers don't have to worry that a patient with an urgent need will have to wait too long for an appointment.

The health center has also reduced the negative effects of no-shows. "Every health center struggles with its no-show rate, and tries to get it as low as possible," says Dr. Alli. "We do use the no-show prediction tool," says Dr. Alli. "It works well. Only about a third of the patients who were predicted to be no-shows actually come in – and that prediction gets better and better as time goes on."

With the no-show tool, HJAHC can double-book with more confidence. "Before, we didn't double-book at all," says Dr. Alli. "We know that if we don't double-book, we run wildly under capacity."

HJAHC

Henry J. Austin Health Center provides care to approximately 16,000 people each year in more than 76,000 visits to its four Trenton, New Jersey, offices. HJAHC is accredited by both the Joint Commission and the National Committee for Quality Assurance.