

Better Scheduling Boosts Utilization and Patient Experience

“Our top priority with scheduling is to get patients in with the right doctor at the right location as quickly as possible,” says Kevin Deter, Chief Operating Officer at Peachtree Orthopedics in Atlanta

That’s a simple objective to state, but more complicated to achieve. At Peachtree, optimal patient scheduling means reconciling patients’ availability and their need for speedy access with individual providers’ specialties and preferences.

Peachtree’s journey to improving patient access was catalyzed by a leadership team that made access a strategic priority and by finding the right platform to match patients and providers.

Appointment schedulers meet a complex challenge

Peachtree Orthopedics is a thriving practice. The group’s **33 physicians and 20 physician assistants see more than 130,000 patients each year at eight locations** in greater the Atlanta region. Before Peachtree implemented Dash Schedule, the practice did scheduling in-house, and then through an outside vendor. Every Peachtree provider—whether physician or PA—has unique preferences for the types of patients they see and when they want to see them. The practice’s dozen or so schedulers needed to memorize each provider’s preferences or look them up in a hard-copy booklet, Deter relates.

Aiming to meet the needs of each and every patient, Peachtree’s schedulers were spending a lot of time on the phone manually scanning for open slots in a calendar-based scheduling system. Even with all the schedulers’ efforts, providers wondered if they could make the process more patient-friendly.

A streamlined, flexible solution makes patients and providers happy

Peachtree was ready for a fresh start. The practice’s doctors made it clear that their priority was that *“if a patient requests a certain doctor all the time, that patient*

preference drives who they will see,” Deter says.

Deter and his colleagues chose Relatient’s Dash Schedule, a comprehensive centralized and patient self-scheduling solution, to solve issues of efficiency, flexibility and utilization.

With the new system’s open templates and instant visibility into available appointments, *“we’re able to schedule patients at their own convenience,”* Deter says.

The scheduling engine dynamically interprets rules based on patient demand. Providers can specify their preferred mix of new patients and rechecks, the number of Medicare patients per day, and many other criteria. Deter has worked with Relatient to achieve a further objective, load-balancing new patients among doctors.

Peachtree’s schedulers are finding that the new system makes them more effective in their work. *“Dash pushes to the scheduler only those time slots where the rules for a given provider’s template are met,”* says Deter.

Fewer scheduling errors, better handling of cancellations and no-shows

Providers and administrators are happy to see a reduction in scheduling errors. *“Dash drives the scheduler through the process and automatically narrows the list of providers to the right ones for a given patient,”* Deter says.

If there’s a cancellation, Dash Schedule automatically texts another patient who has an appointment at a later time or date, asking if they’d like to see the provider sooner. The patient simply replies Y or N to accept or reject the appointment change.

The solution’s intelligent double-booking has also been a boon to providers, and to patients seeking last-minute appointments. *“The longer we use Dash, the more accurate the system becomes with double-booking patients who have a history of cancellations or no-shows,”* says Deter.

Utilization is up, scheduling costs are curbed

Peachtree has reaped meaningful improvements in capacity utilization since implementing Dash Schedule. Consider the statistics for Peachtree clinicians in the three-month periods before and after a Dash Schedule template was implemented. **Physicians' utilization increased by 4.7 percent.**

Self-scheduled appointments have risen sharply. **Within the first quarter of implementing Dash Schedule, approximately 10 percent of all scheduled appointments were booked online.**

With all these improvements, Peachtree can deliver a better patient experience to more patients, while controlling labor costs. Even with a slightly smaller scheduling staff, the practice has kept up with its steadily increasing call volume.

Deter is gratified to have steered Peachtree to a scheduling solution that works well for both patients and providers.

"The entire scheduling process is much, much improved with Dash."

Dash solutions utilized:

 Dash
Schedule

The Dash Schedule benefits that Peachtree Orthopedics values most:

- 1 "Physician preferences are incorporated into the system, so that our schedulers can truly work paper-free."
- 2 "Open templates, which let us schedule patients at their convenience, while optimizing for physician preferences."
- 3 "Patient self-scheduling, because many patients just want to do it themselves."

Source: Kevin Deter interview

**PEACHTREE
ORTHOPEDICS**

- Based in Atlanta, GA
- 53 providers
- 8 service locations
- EHR & PM functions: athenahealth

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