Design and Operational Considerations for Improving Emergency Department Waiting Experiences

Zahra Zamani, Ewing Cole
Nicholas Watkins
**Abstract #2932**

**Design and Operational Considerations for Improving Emergency Department Waiting Experiences**

Advancing the quality of the waiting room experience with opportunities for positive distractions can lead to reduced stress, improved satisfaction, heightened mood, and a likelihood of referral for patients. This cross-sectional study explored the impact of distraction activities (reading, watching TV, phone interactions, etc.) and non-distraction activities (talking, not engaged, etc.). Data collection involved behavioral observations of patients using the DOTT® application. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five team members. The observer systematically walked through the ED and recorded patients’ behaviors, gender, and use of mobile technologies. The DOTT® observational findings revealed that most of the time, patients were engaged in conversations (24.07%, N=558), looked around (22.13%), were in motion (21.49%), interacted with phones (14.22%), or watched TV (8.89%). Men watched TV 4% more compared with females (11.21% and 6.88% respectively). Only 24.13% (n=159) of observed behaviors were of distraction activities.

Team members had the following design and operational suggestions for improving patients’ waiting experiences: 1) Spatial: include visual cues or signage to improve wayfinding (n=3); increase waiting area size (n=2); improve comfort of furnishings; heighten visibility of the waiting area (n=3); move waiting areas closer to care stations; 2) Communication: provide continuous information updates to patients (n=4); coordinate team member shifts to reduce congestion and bottlenecks; 3) Patient flow: improve behavioral health patient flow to decrease wait times for other patient types and improve patient satisfaction (n=3); 4) Safety: hire public-safety officers; adopt technology to control traffic to triage; 5) Policy: verve team members in customer service.

The findings are useful for healthcare team members and designers who want to improve the design of ED waiting areas. Future studies should further explore how gender differences, mobile technologies and patient flows impact the patient and family waiting experience.

- Understand the importance of incorporating distraction activities in waiting rooms.
- Distinguish distraction and non-distraction behaviors in healthcare environments.
- Apply interactive technologies to enhance opportunities for distraction activities
- Understand the importance of ED waiting rooms with high visibility surveillance and safety facilities