How are People Spending their Time in Outpatient Waiting Rooms?

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Research Objective
The objective of this study was to observe how patients were spending their time while waiting for their appointments in outpatient waiting rooms at a single medical center. We hypothesized that the majority of the observed patients would be actively using their smartphones or mobile devices. Healthcare is changing to be more patient-centered, with a focus on self-management (Deegan). The concept of patient activation while visiting a healthcare facility engages the patient to generate visit-specific thoughts and questions addressing patient-specific concerns for their visit. Being able to engage the patients in their own healthcare will allow for better self-management (Hibbard). Research done by Hibbard et al., states that patients who are actively engaged in their healthcare decision-making have better health and functioning, better quality of life and are more satisfied with their care (Macdonald-Wilson). The introduction of a “Ready Room” at health care facilities could dramatically decrease the amount of patients observed doing nothing at all by encouraging them to be engaged in their healthcare with modern software programs, such as CommonGround™, designed by Pat Deegan, PhD.

Methods
• Observations were recorded with paper and pencil using a hierarchical structure to account for overlaps in classification (two simultaneous activities).
• This allowed each classification to be mutually exclusive.
• Patients’ waiting were classified according to the following activities: actively talking on or using a smartphone, feature phone or tablet, holding a smartphone, feature phone, tablet, book or magazine, listening to headphones, reading, filling out medical paperwork, talking to someone or doing nothing at all.
• Three observers recorded observations from 12 different outpatient waiting rooms.
• Ten total observations took place on 7 days over the course of three weeks.
• Results were recorded in REDCap and analyzed using SPSS and Excel.

Results
A total of 1022 adult patients were observed over the recording period. It was found that of the 1022 adult patients, they were observed doing the following activities. The classification hierarchy can also be observed below.
• Number of adults Actively using (thumbs out) a – Smartphone: 15.36%, Feature Phone: 0.097%, Tablet: 0.88%.
• Number of adults Talking on/to a – Smartphone: 1.66%, Feature Phone: 0.49%, Magazine/Newspaper: 0.29%.
• Number of adults with Headphones in: 0.49%.
• Number of adults Reading a – Book: 1.85%, Magazine/Newspaper: 3.52%.
• Number of adults Filling out Medical Paperwork: 8.02%.
• Number of adults Talking to Someone: 16.24%.
• Number of adults Doing Nothing at all: 46.48%.

Conclusion
In the largest category, 46.68% of patients were observed doing nothing at all. Additionally, none of the patients were clearly doing anything to prepare themselves for their visit, with the exception of those filling out medical paperwork (0.02%). We theorize that the introduction of a “Ready Room” would be a place where patients are being actively engaged in their health care visit. Pat Deegan’s CommonGround™ software program is primarily designed to engage patients before they come to a health care facility. Instead of engaging the patient before coming, development and incorporation of this type of software program right at the health care facility would not only generate patient participation in their health care but also actively engage patients at the health care facility. Such innovations could dramatically reduce the stagnant character of waiting rooms. Much like “the CHICA system” (Anand), patients could be asked visit-specific questions at a “Ready Room” facility, right on site. Pointing questioning forces the patient to start thinking about similar questions their doctor could ask during their exam. By completing pointed questioning, the patient is more prepared for their health care visit. As the health care system begins shifting toward patient-centered and value-based care, the introduction of “Ready Rooms” throughout health care facilities has tremendous potential to increase both patient involvement in their health care and patient satisfaction.

References