



# Online Scheduling for New Patients

*Online scheduling is widely available for many consumer experiences, including restaurant reservations and beauty appointments, and patients expect similar functionality when scheduling appointments with their health care provider. In many Vanderbilt clinics, patients were able to self-schedule follow-up appointments with clinicians they had already seen, but complex and varied rules made it overly difficult to schedule online with a new clinician.*

## CHALLENGE

Patients new to Vanderbilt needed to be able to self-schedule online, but existing rules were clinician-specific, complex and varied greatly across VUMC

## SOLUTION

Leverage integration between My Health at Vanderbilt and eStar to execute complex backend logic but present seamless experience for patients

## OUTCOMES

Improved access to care for new patients, freeing of labor for more complex tasks, and feature offering in high demand by market

“Online scheduling helps connect patients to providers whenever it’s most convenient for the patient—and not just our scheduling team. By meeting patients wherever they are in their day, we immediately start them on their journey of personalized care at Vanderbilt Health. With online scheduling, we’re more competitive in the market and more patient-centered than ever before.”

—Janice Smith, RN, MEd

Scheduling patients with Vanderbilt clinicians who they have never seen meant human intervention—phone calls with specialists who could navigate the web of scheduling rules that governed the type of patients specific clinicians would see (e.g., only those with a certain type of condition) or the rules necessary to see that clinician (e.g, insurance pre-authorization).

These complex rules made it incredibly difficult to move scheduling to a self-service online model. Market forces and patient expectations, however, demanded that VUMC determine a solution.

Various teams from across the organization, including HealthIT’s Product Development, Patient Access and Revenue Cycle teams, the My Health at Vanderbilt (MHAV) team, and Marketing, commenced an extensive collaborative process to tackle the issue. They developed an innovative solution that relies on integrations among various systems: MHAV and eStar (VUMC’s Epic-based EHR).

Patients select the type of specialist (e.g., dermatologist) with whom they want to schedule, and are then guided through a series of questions that match them with the clinician best

suited for their health care needs. In some cases, patients can pick from multiple clinicians and appointment dates/times to fit their schedule.

The cross-departmental team began rollout of the feature with service areas that have fewer scheduling rules and barriers—for example, most cosmetic surgery patients are “self-pay,” so insurance pre-authorizations are typically not a factor. Online scheduling for new patients is becoming more widespread across VUMC as more clinics work with the multi-department team to offer it.

Online scheduling for new patients has resulted in numerous positive outcomes:

- Improving access to care
- Increasing patient satisfaction
- Meeting patient expectations for online scheduling
- Reserving the knowledge and skills of scheduling experts to focus on complex requests, such as coordinating pre-appointment testing
- Reducing open slots in clinicians’ schedules, improving their satisfaction and productivity
- Improving competitive advantage with other health systems