



Enhancing User Experience of PTA Tool

Provider Time Away (PTA) is used by Vanderbilt clinicians to request time away from scheduled clinical duties. Designed especially for VUMC, the app also helps clinical leadership enforce the organization's policy preventing patients from being rescheduled within six weeks of their appointments. Unfortunately, low adoption by clinicians, likely attributed to less-than-user-friendly features, hindered leadership visibility into compliance with the "bumping" policy.

CHALLENGE

Low usage rates of Provider Time Away (PTA) app by clinicians provided little visibility for leaders into compliance with institution-wide policy regarding re-scheduling of patients

SOLUTION

Implement more user-friendly features, add behind-the-scenes logic, and establish integration with schedules in eStar to improve effectiveness and adoption of PTA

OUTCOMES

Improved usage rate by clinicians, user satisfaction with the app, and leadership visibility into critical compliance issue. Also fostered better patient experience through fewer appointments re-scheduled within six weeks

“The enhanced PTA tool allows clinicians to easily control their templates when they need to be away from patient care responsibilities. Proactive utilization of the tool reduces patient inconvenience related to last-minute appointment cancellations, decreases staff utilization for rescheduling such appointments, and facilitates efficient release and re-allocation of clinic and OR space and staff resources.”

—Shubhada Jagasia, MD, MMHC

Many clinicians expressed frustration with the PTA app, used to request time away from clinical duties, and its associated workflows.

As a result, usage rates were low, and leadership had little visibility into how many patients were being rescheduled out of compliance with VUMC policy. Moreover, patients were dissatisfied if they were re-scheduled too close to their original appointment time, or, even worse, showed up for an appointment and their clinician was not available.

The PTA team gathered feedback from clinicians, their schedulers and leaders to gain insight into how to improve the app. Updates included:

- Automating approvals of requests that meet clinical policy
- Sending automated communication of requests to appropriate individuals
- Integrating backend logic to help enforce the six-week bumping policy
- Inserting Approve/Deny buttons directly in email notifications to expedite requests that require manual review
- Adding in "grayouts" for high-request periods (e.g., winter break)

- Letting clinicians request increments of time under a half-day (for meetings, personal appointments, etc.)
- Expanding user permissions so clinical areas can administer permissions for the PTA request workflow (approvers, schedulers, etc.)

Most significantly, the PTA team established an integration with the scheduling module in eStar, VUMC's EHR. Requested time-away periods are immediately "held" so no new appointments are scheduled. Once the request is approved, any appointments in that period are sent to an eStar report queue to be rescheduled in a timely manner.

These changes to PTA resulted in several positive outcomes, including:

- Increased app usage by 27.3% and user adoption by 18% (year-over-year)
- Improved coordination of operations throughout VUMC via appropriate staffing
- Greater satisfaction among clinical leadership due to better visibility and ease of use
- Stronger patient satisfaction, as fewer patients are being re-scheduled within six weeks

* Users can access PTA through <https://pta.app.vumc.org/pta/auth>. It is also available through the eStar Help menu.

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