

OFFICE STAFF TRAINING

Access to Care: Best Practices



What barriers are standing in the way of your patients getting the care they need for their best possible health outcomes? Issues with communication, availability of services and transportation are examples of barriers that can prevent some patients from getting care they need when they need it.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

SCAN Health Plan® recommends the following best practices for ensuring that patients have adequate and timely access to the services, facilities and care that support optimum health.

SCHEDULE PATIENT-APPROPRIATE APPOINTMENTS

- When scheduling appointment times, factor in the patients' specific issues and concerns. For example, additional time or multiple appointments may be needed for senior patients, especially if they have several chronic conditions.
- When scheduling future appointments and referrals, keep in mind issues that could affect the patients' ability to access care. How far away do they live, and how difficult is it to get to an appointment? When appropriate, consider alternative care options, such as home visits, house calls and telehealth visits.
- Make it a goal to see patients within 15 minutes of their scheduled appointment time. This can help improve both efficiency in the office and patient satisfaction. If it looks like the wait will be a bit longer, touch base with patients by using the time to provide educational materials, assist with forms or perform other care activities.
- Set future appointments before patients leave the office. Patients are more likely to return if they don't have to remember to schedule an appointment after they get home.
- Develop a patient referral checklist that staff can use to walk patients through the referral process and manage their expectations. SCAN has created a template that you can customize and print out or integrate into your current processes. If you'd like a copy of the template, email askthetrainer@scanhealthplan.com.

COMMUNICATE FOR BETTER UNDERSTANDING

- Keep all communications—verbal and written—simple, respectful and direct. Wherever possible, use familiar words and avoid complex medical terminology or technical jargon. Visual tools, such as simple pictures, charts and larger print, often make complicated information easier to understand.
- Use teach-back at every visit to check for understanding. Ask patients to share in their own words what's been explained to confirm they understand their treatment plan.
- Be aware of language barriers, which can be a significant obstacle to a patient getting needed care. SCAN offers interpreters in more than 40 languages to speak with members on the phone or even accompany them to healthcare appointments. SCAN members needing translation services should call SCAN Member Services at 1-800-559-3500 (TTY: 711). Note: For a translator to meet at the doctor's office, members must call at least 48 hours before the scheduled appointment.
- Look for issues in your patients' lives that could make it difficult for them to get needed care. Economic stability, living arrangements, education, cultural or religious beliefs, food security and even computer access—being aware of the issues like these your patients might be facing can help you better identify and break through barriers to care.

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CASE IN POINT

One of your patients with diabetes is just home from the hospital. Asking questions like the following can identify patient issues that can be addressed in the patient's treatment plan.

- Do you need help understanding the hospital discharge summary?
- Are you finding it difficult to manage your diet, exercise, sleep or anything else in living with your diabetes?
- Are you having any problems with your medications, or have any questions about how to take them?
Do you know about mail-order services?
- Is it difficult for you to get to your medical appointments or get to where you need to go?
- Do you need help understanding what's covered by your insurance plan?
- Do you know how to get in touch with us if you have a problem or question, such as through our patient portal, by email or by phone?

Follow up on your patient's post-visit progress. A phone call to the patient or caregiver can catch and address issues before the next visit—and before they become more serious.

PROVIDE ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

- Know what insurance coverage your patients have and what's covered under their plan.
- For example, many SCAN members have a benefit that provides free transportation to and from medical appointments and the pharmacy.
- Be aware of what's available in the community. That way, you'll be ready to recommend local resources that provide access to care and services that might benefit your patients' physical and mental health and overall quality of life.
- One example is Community Connections (scanstaff.auntbertha.com) a database that can connect SCAN members and providers to local social and health services available in neighborhoods across the country.



For questions or to schedule a training, contact us at:

 askthetrainer@scanhealthplan.com  855-SCAN-OST (855-722-6678)