

How OSF Healthcare significantly reduced their nurse triage wait time and abandoned call rate by safely decreasing calls to nurse triage.

OSF/SymptomScreen Case Study

Background

OSF HealthCare is an integrated health care system of over 150 health care facilities, services and providers serving patients of all ages across Illinois and Michigan. OSF OnCall, the digital arm of OSF, offers customized digital health solutions, merging innovation with clinical expertise to support individuals on their health and wellness journeys. Together, nurses and agents in the OSF OnCall Contact Center handle clinical and non-clinical patient requests, including office and diagnostic scheduling, care navigation and nurse triage.

Prior to implementing SymptomScreen, OSF OnCall had a telephone triage list to assist non-clinical agents with determining the next appropriate step for patients experiencing an illness or other symptom. This list was a one-page PDF that outlined at a high level the symptoms that needed to go to triage or be transferred back to the patient's medical group office. Most symptoms were written in red text, meaning the patient needed emergent nurse triage, and some were written in black text, meaning the patient needed non-emergent nurse triage. The PDF was a very manual process, requiring the agent to scan the text while listening for "red-flag words" the caller might say.

Key Facts

86% decrease in average time to answer for nurse triage

Reduced from 8:51 (eight minutes and fifty-one seconds) to 1:12 while average time to answer for OSF OnCall Contact Center agents only increased 2 seconds (1:02 to 1:04)

69% decrease in abandoned calls for nurse triage

Reduced from 23.8% to 7.5%

20% increase in office visits scheduled by agents as opposed to by nurses

Changed from 13,346 to 16,639 weekly

Challenges

Outdated Resources and Manual Processes: The telephone triage list PDF and other static resources were utilized to screen patients and guide agents on workflows. These resources were labor intensive to maintain and at times out of date. Lack of automation existed, leading to additional inconsistencies.

Long Wait Times: Due to the overreliance on memorization of the telephone triage list PDF by the agents and the absence of technology, too many calls were being unnecessarily routed to nurse triage. This resulted in long wait times for patients to reach triage nurses or other clinical staff, leading to frustration for the patients, high call abandonment rates, and operational inefficiencies for the team.

Nurses Operating Beneath Skill Set: Nurses were losing valuable time to clerical tasks such as scheduling and handling phone calls that did not require their expertise, which kept them from working at the top of their license.

Lack of Standards: The absence of clear standards regarding the reasons to escalate calls and refer calls back to practices led to inconsistencies and inefficiencies across both the OSF OnCall Contact Center and OSF Medical Group offices.

Data Transparency: There was no mechanism to track and share data regarding symptoms, call outcomes, and messages exchanged between the OSF OnCall Contact Center and OSF Medical Group offices.

How SymptomScreen Helps the OSF OnCall Team



Scripted Navigation: Consistently, safely, and quickly guides the OSF OnCall Contact Center agent through predetermined yes or no screening questions based on the symptom(s) the patient is reporting.

RN Triage Prioritization: Appropriately prioritizes calls for nurse triage while reducing the number of unnecessary calls sent to the nurse triage queue.

Documentation and Data: Assists the OSF OnCall Contact Center agent with accurate and timely documentation of the call and collects reportable data to ensure data-driven decision making.

Additional Key Facts

45% reduction in calls transferred to nurse triage

Reduced from 8,149 to 4,521 transfers weekly

21% decrease in daily calls to office backlines

29% increase in service level answer for nurse triage

11% decrease in cost per contact for nurse triage

How SymptomScreen Helps OSF Patients



Screening Guides: Guides and clinical content are written and maintained by the Schmitt Decision Logic authoring team including trusted expert Dr. Barton Schmitt. A team of OSF providers have reviewed and customized this to work for the OSF clinical team.

Safe Call Handling: Promotes consistency and safety by getting calls to the appropriate location in the appropriate time frame.

Accuracy of Scheduling: Ensures patients are scheduled for appointments in the correct time frame.

Results

- » Nurse Triage now **almost exclusively focuses on clinical inquiry and patient triage**, reducing the clerical burden on nurses and allowing them to work at the top of their license.
- » Agents in the offices **are now able to directly schedule patients**, decreasing the need to interrupt and involve clinical team members.
- » Agents are **able to utilize InBasket messages for lower priority calls** instead of calling and interrupting the practice, eliminating unnecessary calls to practice backlines.
- » **Less time spent on the phone for patients** due to decreases in hold times and the increase in the agents' ability to schedule.



The implementation of **SymptomScreen** has allowed the nurses to work at the top of their licensure by having them focus on higher acuity triages. This has positively impacted the overall satisfaction and retention of the nursing staff.

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