

## Can Workflow Cost You?

### Project Background

Does a physician's movement (i.e., workflow) have a cost associated with it? Aspects contributing to these costs are often overlooked and rarely studied. Why is this? One overarching reason is physicians, office management and staff are frequently overwhelmed with just running the business day-to-day to identify root causes and implement workflow improvements. As a result, waste and process inefficiencies creep into the practice often at a high cost of "physician" labor. Within this podiatry practice, physician leadership requested a workflow study be conducted to focus on identifying and eliminating workflow inefficiencies and waste.

### Current State

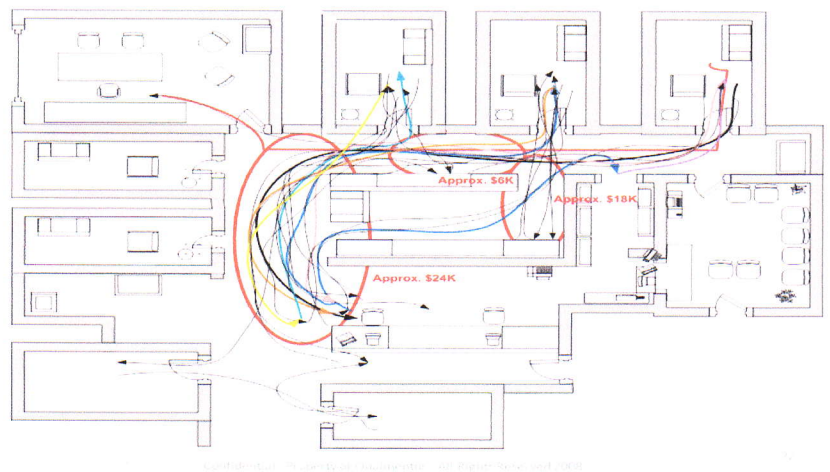
At this office, treating patients could trigger any number of support activities (e.g., placing patient in room, filling shots, locating x-rays, determining insurability, checking patients out, etc.). Often, the physician would feel compelled to take ownership of these activities when they were the responsibility of front / back office staff. Seemingly insignificant, the higher labor cost to perform these activities versus a staff employee equated to approximately \$48K annually in (physician) labor time.

These costs were compounded by the fact that this podiatry practice required the physician to see clinical study patients which were geographically distanced by 50-60 feet. Though the movement was often required, the work associated with unplanned visits and office staff disruptions (e.g., general study questions) to and from both areas came with a greater cost due to the disruption in workflow.

### Key Changes

- Shifted supporting activities back to front / back office staff.
- Refined procedures to ensure patient information (e.g., x-rays, insurance information) would be available to physician when treating a patient.
- Altered Physician's routine so he would not have to walk patient / charts to check out area.
- Optimized medical practice schedule to minimize number of unplanned trips to clinical study area.
- Incorporated administrative time into the physician's schedule to perform administrative work.

Office Workflow - Cost



## Controlling the Gains

Making improvements to a process is often straightforward. Changing the behavior and adhering to a new process is more difficult but key to success. Sustaining the new process requires support and accountability from the entire practice. What gets measured often gets changed.



**“I knew that I wasted a little time throughout my day but had no idea how much until I saw the results of the movement study. It was obvious I needed to change my behaviors just like I was asking the rest of the office to do.”**

**- Physician**

**Conclusions & Results** Several weeks after the kaizen event, office staff roles, responsibilities and supporting activities were reassessed and realigned as required. Adhering to one medical practice patient schedule alleviated the need for unplanned movement to and from the clinical study area. The Physician no longer hand-delivered charts to

the check out area which provided him more time with scheduled patients and permitted the him to work at a pace that was more manageable. The total estimated annual cost of labor savings due to inefficient workflows was approximately \$100K.

## About Qualmentus Inc.

Qualmentus is a consulting group comprised of certified efficiency specialists dedicated to the improvement of business operations within the healthcare community. Clients experience an increase in net income, staff productivity and patient satisfaction. Working closely with the office staff, Qualmentus designs and implements solutions with measurable results using an approach based on Lean Six Sigma.

**Co Founder Patrick Widhelm** — Seven years experience in process engineering and program management at USAA and in the US Air Force Space Program. Patrick holds a Masters in Public Policy from Harvard University and graduated Summa Cum Laude from the US Air Force Academy with a BS in Management. He is Six Sigma Black Belt certified and specializes in statistical analysis and data modeling.

**Co Founder Sergio Trevino** — Seven years of process engineering experience in the field of Health Care, Property & Casualty Insurance, Life Insurance, Banking, Financial Services and Grocery Supply Chain Management. Sergio earned an MBA from Our Lady of the Lake University in e-Commerce Management, graduating with honors. Lean Six Sigma Black Belt trained, Sergio specializes in strategic business planning and the implementation of lean operations.