

Traditionally, Calgary patients have always accessed community laboratories on a walk-in first-come-first-serve basis. However as population increases, so does the number of patient visits and the demand on health care resources. By the end of 2006, 5,000 patients/day were accessing CLS 18 Patient Service Centres (PSC) with 75% of the work volume arriving by 1200 hrs due to fasting requirements. As part of our ongoing commitment to provide the best service possible and distribute the workload over the entire day, CLS now offers appointments at 10 of our 18 community sites. Patients with appointments are attended to within minutes of arriving for their designated booking, significantly reducing their wait time.

There are many other benefits to this new service including:

- Improved access for better patient care, especially for seniors and patients who have to arrange for transportation or a handi-bus, to get to a laboratory.
- The ability to better accommodate ambulatory patients that don't qualify for mobile services, but who may be adversely affected physically by having to wait longer periods in the PSC, example: Cancer patients on chemotherapy, pregnant women or diabetics who may have to fast extended periods of time prior to their test
- The convenience to patients which allows for more flexibility in arranging their own schedules.

How the Process Works

There are 2 process streams to accommodate patients at the PSC's that offer patient appointment services:

Signage in the PSC waiting area gives directions to both walk-in and appointment patients:

1. Patients with Appointments

Patients with appointments present their information to the PSC reception staff upon arrival (they do not take a number from the Q-matic machine). Staff check off the patient name from the pre-printed appointment log sheets. The data is entered into the computer system and the patient is asked to wait for their phlebotomy collection in the reserved seating area.

Appointments are booked on the ¼ hour or every 15 minutes—with 5-6 patients per time slot depending on the number of phlebotomy rooms at the particular site. There are always more phlebotomy rooms available than appointments booked. This is to accommodate walk-in patients. In addition, a typical phlebotomy time takes about 6 minutes. As long as there are no complications, the remaining 9 minutes left in this time slot will be used to take phlebotomy collections from walk-in patients.

2. Walk-in Patients

As signage indicates, these patients are instructed to take a number from the machine and have a seat. Designated reception staff call sequential numbers from the queue. As their number is called, patients are required to present their laboratory requisition and AHC card; staff enter their information into the computer and ask patients to wait their turn in the reserved seating area.

Is this service working?

Currently the CLS Patient Appointment line handles an average of 500-600 calls/day

The response and demand for service is so high that we've had to upgrade computer infrastructure and phone switches and hire additional staff to accommodate the high number of calls.

We continue to receive very positive feedback from patients especially the 50,000 standing order patients within Calgary who have recurring tests requiring frequent laboratory visits.

This service has proven to be very popular and in the future it is anticipated that all 18 Patient Service Centres will accept appointments.

Patient Testimonials

“Your new Appointment Service is a huge improvement, and I am very pleased with this added level of service.”

“I wasn't aware that appointments could be made until this morning. What a great idea!

“Being able to make appointments is a huge step forward – thank you!”

“Just wanted to let you know how efficient the PSC appointment times for blood work is. I had an appointment at Market Mall. Taken in at exactly the time booked (standing order), in and out in five minutes. Being a diabetic, this is a great help.”