

Digging out: A regional cancer center resolved a 9-month backlog in 6 weeks by partnering with a telehealth genetic counseling organization

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PROFESSIONAL ISSUES

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## Advancing the genetic counseling profession through research: Identification of priorities by the National Society of Genetic Counselors research task force

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### 4.4 | Access

17. Which policies reduce barriers/promote access to genetic counseling services and how?
18. What are the barriers/facilitators to providing genetic counseling services to minority and medically underserved populations?
19. What are the common pathways and referral patterns to genetic counseling?
20. How does the changing landscape of access to genetic testing impact the entry points to genetic counseling services?

## Solutions to increasing access

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- Train more GCs
- Have non-GCs do some GC'ing
- Increase GC volume
  - Move GCs to top of scope
  - Increase GC efficiency
- Provide remote GCs to clinics with insufficient GC staff

## Maximizing efficiency & top of scope

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### Technology & tools

- Materials to support GCs
- Automated communications

### Team work

- GCA support
- Partner facilitates testing
- Patient/partner initiated scheduling

### Streamlining

- Tailoring counseling
- Clinic note
- Appointment length

## Partnering to increase access

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### Community cancer center

Backlog of patients

Long wait-times to see a GC



### Telehealth GC organization

Immediately available high throughput  
remote genetic counseling

### Study aim

Examine the use of a high throughput telehealth partnership to improve access to genetic counseling in a regional cancer clinic



# Methods



## Retrospective chart review

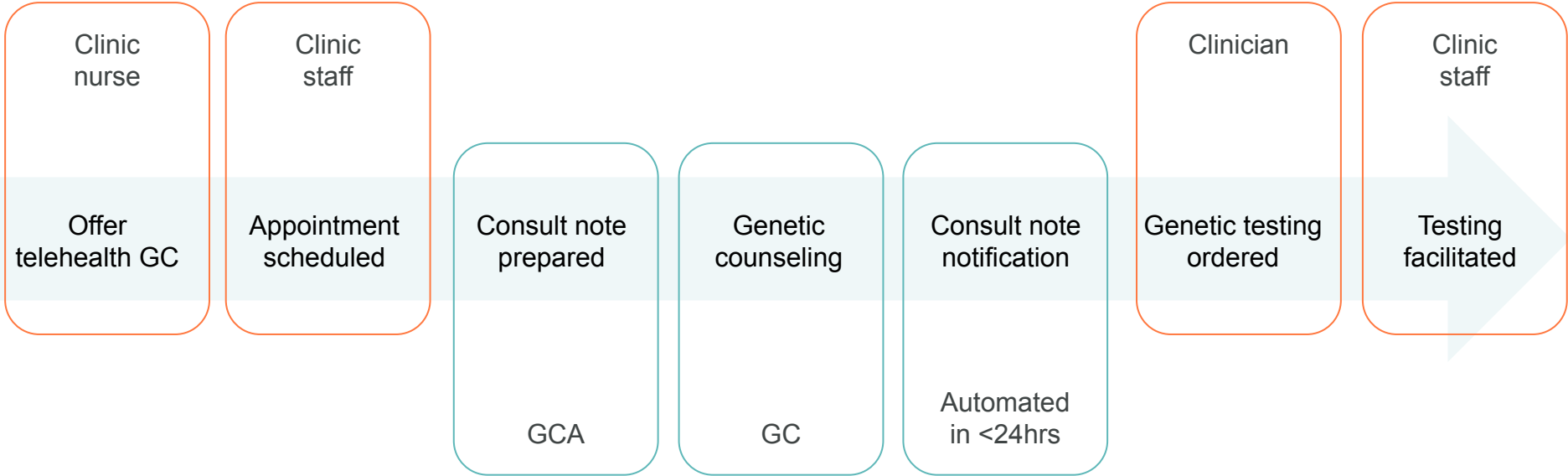
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- Uptake of genetic counseling
- Appointment wait time
  - Prior to partnership
  - During partnership
- Total time to resolve the backlog
- Number of patients seen per week during partnership



# Results

Cancer center clinic



Telehealth genetic counseling organization

## Regional cancer clinic situation

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**293**

patients waiting for  
genetic counseling

**9-month**

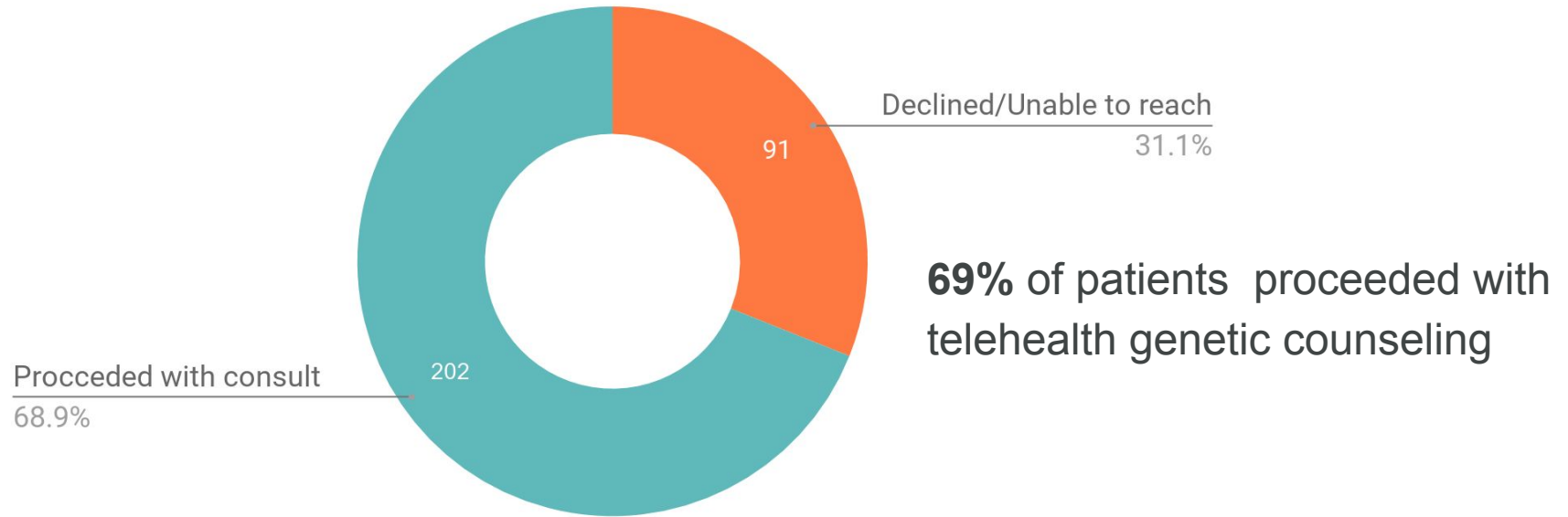
Wait time to see a  
genetic counselor

**1**

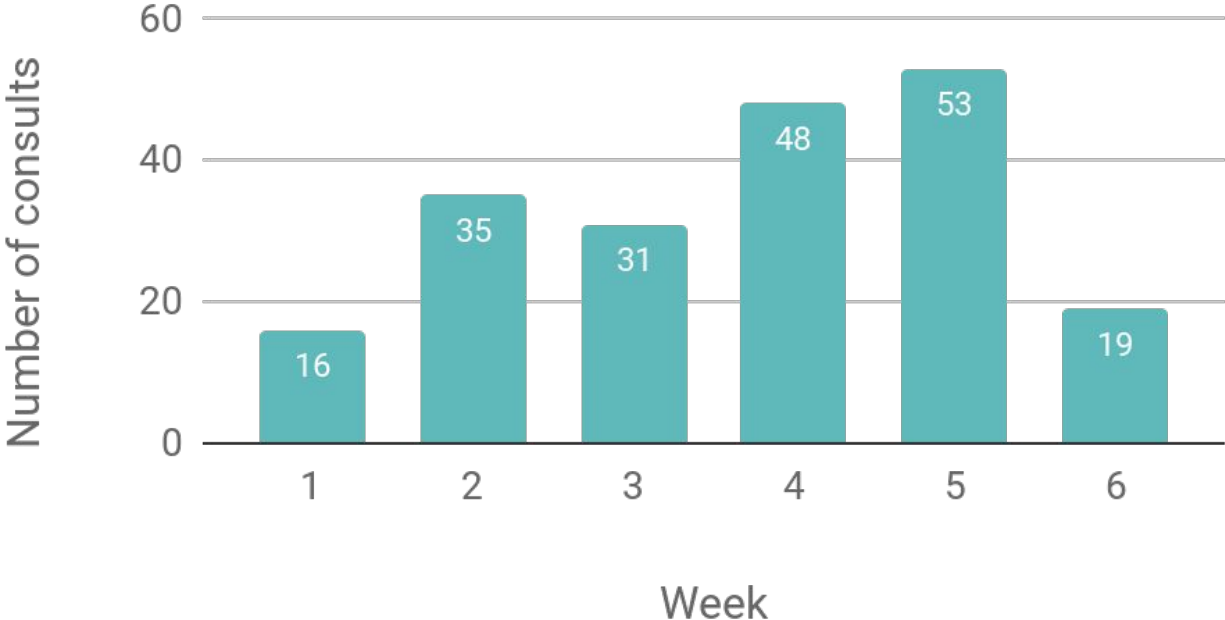
part time genetic  
counselor on staff

## Uptake of telehealth genetic counseling

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# Consults per week



## 6 weeks to resolve backlog

**202**

total patients  
seen

**36.6**

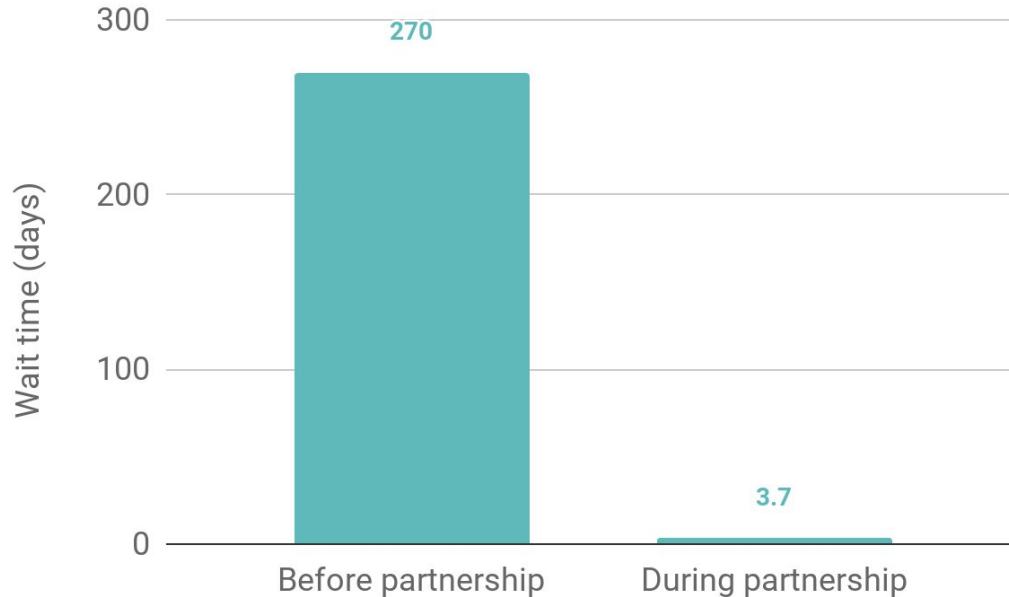
patients seen  
per week

**5.2**

patients seen  
per day

## Time from scheduling to appointment

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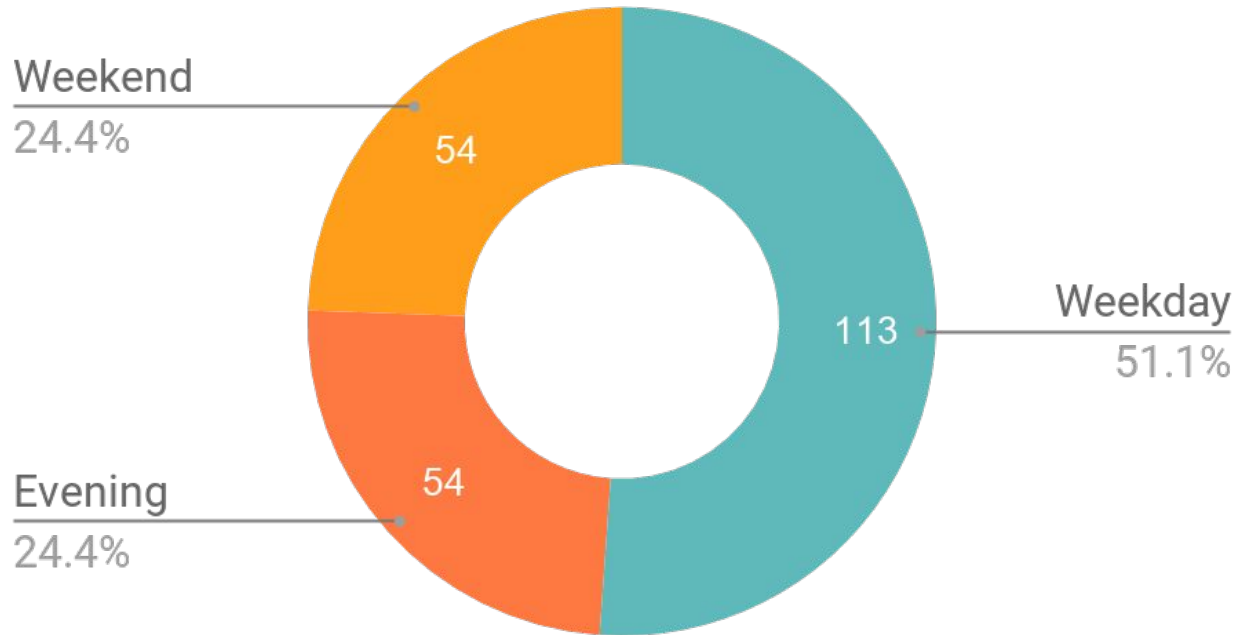


Wait time reduced from  
**9 months** to **3.7 days**

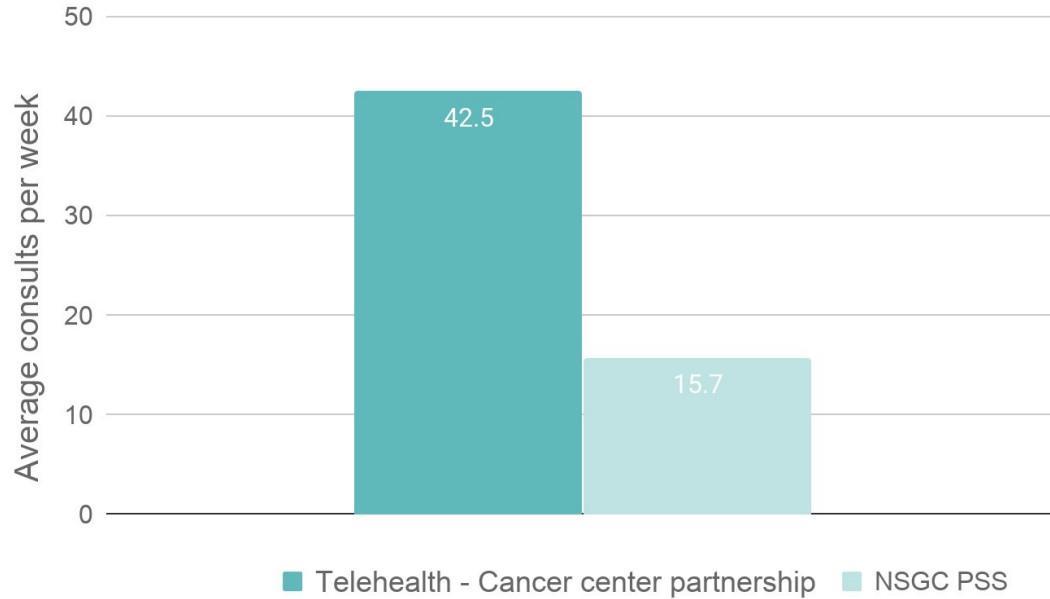



## Half of visits on evenings/weekends

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## Genetic counselor capacity per week





## Discussion

## Increasing access

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Adding remote GCs to a clinic increases access as indicated by

- Decreased appointment wait-time
- Rapid resolution of backlog

## Patients lost due to wait-time?

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- 31% of patients waiting for appointment declined, unreachable
- More timely access may increase uptake of GC

## Evenings & weekends

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- Nearly half of patients preferred evening or weekend appointment
- GCs need to improve access outside Mon-Fri 9-5?

The image shows a calendar interface for October 2020. The calendar is displayed in a grid format with columns for days of the week (SUN to SAT) and rows for dates. The current date is Wednesday, October 30, which is highlighted with a blue circle. The calendar shows appointment slots for evenings and weekends. The slots are color-coded: yellow for 'Evening' and red for 'Weekend'. The slots are arranged in a repeating pattern every 7 days.

Today	<	>	October 2020	🔍	?	⚙️	Month
SUN 27	MON 28	TUE 29	WED 30	THU Oct 1	FRI 2	SAT 3	
	Evening A	Evening A	Evening A	Evening A	Evening	Weekend	
4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Weekend	Evening	Evening	Evening	Evening	Evening	Weekend	
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
Weekend	Evening	Evening	Evening	Evening	Evening	Weekend	
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	
Weekend	Evening	Evening	Evening	Evening	Evening	Weekend	
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	
Weekend	Evening	Evening	Evening	Evening	Evening	Weekend	



## Limitations

### Study limitations

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- Did not have data on:
  - Reasons for declining telehealth GC
  - Follow-through on sample collection
  - Clinical or psychosocial impact of delayed care or later better access to care





## Conclusions

## Telehealth partnership increases access

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### Increased access

- Effectively resolved backlog in 6 weeks
- Dramatically decreased appointment wait times (9 months to 3.7 days)

### Likely due to

- Increased staffing provided by partnership
- Appointment availability on evenings/weekends



Questions?

Thank you

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Colleen Caeshu MS LCGC, GeneMatters

Hanah Cytron, GeneMatters  
Emily Stearns, GeneMatters  
Kristina Conrad, GeneMatters

