
THE PATIENT WILL SEE YOU NOW

How 2020 Changed the Patient Experience Forever

Until recently, healthcare was something people only thought about when they got sick. They called the doctor's office, booked an appointment, and then waited — sometimes for days — until it was time for their office visit. This was the patient experience until early 2020, when Covid-19 blew up everything Americans accepted as conventional care. Masking up, social distancing and self-quarantining became the new normal, and healthcare became omnipresent in everyday lives.

So, what will the next generation patient experience look like in a post-pandemic world? Many, including the Healthcare Financial Management Association (HFMA), point to the concept of systemness as the answer. Systemness is an approach that ensures a patient has the same experience no matter who they interact with or which doctor they see, and calls for embedding system-wide standards into everyday processes.



"Experience isn't a thing organizations do, it is who they are," says Jason Wolf, president and CEO of The Beryl Institute. He believes that patient experience and patient safety are more than checkboxes on a list. Rather, they're part of an organization's DNA. "The organizations that get this right acknowledge it in every interaction they have and with every person in that organization, they are providing the experience that people deserve."

But it's patients who are really driving the new tenets of care, having experienced first-hand the advantages that technology offers. As the number of alternative access points proliferate, patients will have more choices on where they spend their healthcare dollars. To survive, healthcare organizations will need to reimagine their traditional and digital footprints and provide care on the patient's terms. Here's how 2020 set the stage for re-engineering the patient experience.

IT'S THE JOURNEY, NOT THE DESTINATION

An appointment reminder was once the start of patient engagement, but now it's merely one type of event in the patient lifecycle. Today's patient experience is a journey — enabled by technology but managed by human beings. It can be mapped to explore and capture the emotional, mental and social experiences of individuals and groups interacting with a complex system. Journey mapping can identify the reasons why patients, family members and healthcare providers respond as they do to transitions in care. Ultimately, it can highlight opportunities for two-way communication, improvement or needed change.

The pandemic shed light on just how critically important innovation is to the patient journey. Rapid adoption of online access tools helped clinicians stay connected to their patients when they otherwise couldn't. Providers who already had solutions like telehealth, online self-scheduling, online registration and bill pay found themselves better prepared to serve patients during the pandemic. What's more, patients quickly embraced these new methodologies.

The unanticipated shift to virtual care underscored the need for, and importance of, simplified patient access. Patients found telehealth and remote patient monitoring to be surprisingly easy and convenient, allowing them to see their providers from the comfort of their own homes. They no longer had to coordinate office visits around their personal schedules, nor did they need to travel to or find parking at their doctors' office. Nor will they expect to in the future.

According to XtelligentHealthcareMedia, providers need to rethink how technology fits into the overall patient experience and clinic operations. For example, an in-person visit that runs long can leave a telehealth patient in the virtual "waiting room," unaware of why her visit has not yet begun. This can be a big dissatisfier, especially since patients today view their time as important as the provider's.

Adopting an approach based on system-wide standards, or systemness, paves the way for a consistent, individualized journey, no matter how the patient chooses to access care. It breaks down internal silos and creates an experience that encompasses the entire organization. Likewise, systemness enables providers to harness data and contextual content to guide patients through the right touch points at the right time. The result is that well-designed patient journeys can deliver the highest quality care with the fewest touches.



HIP-POCKET HEALTH

Today's patients crave digital interaction and the ability to self-manage certain aspects of their health. A lot of that will transpire by what nearly everyone carries with them every day — the smartphone. A February, 2021, Pew Research Center study found that 85% of Americans now own a smartphone, up from just 35% in 2011.

Smartphones can often double as mobile medical alert bracelets that contain information such as medical conditions, allergies, prescriptions, emergency contacts and blood type. Various apps also allow smartphones to function as a heart rate monitor, sleep guide or to manage medications with reminders and refills. Moreover, smartphones equipped with sensors can continuously monitor a variety of chronic conditions and simultaneously share that data with clinicians.

Having smart tools at the ready can help patients make good choices and plot a healthy trajectory based on personal goals. Wearable tech, for instance, offers providers a way to actively participate in their patient's wellness. Yet NRC's 2021 Healthcare Consumer Trends Report found that fewer than half of providers ever ask about wearable tech or smart phone derived data. Conversely, 57% of consumers want to share data from their personal device with healthcare providers. That's a missed opportunity to obtain a broader perspective on a patient's well-being and discuss what's next in the care continuum.

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CHANGING THE CHANNEL

Patient engagement today sits at the crossroads of technology and multi-generational differences. For providers, communicating with such vastly different audiences can be a challenge. One size no longer fits all. Distinct preferences have created the need for better, and more versatile, communication options.

In response, many healthcare organizations are pursuing an omnichannel strategy to address patient expectations. According to Frost & Sullivan, omnichannel is a "seamless and effortless, high-quality customer experience that occurs within and between contact channels." Becker's HealthIT sums it up: succeeding in an omnichannel world means delivering a connected patient experience across the entire patient journey, from awareness to financial responsibility.



For years, healthcare resisted the trend toward omnichannel communication due to the fragmented nature of care across the patient journey. Covid-19, however, radically altered long-established standards of provider-patient interaction. Since then, healthcare organizations have been reworking their practice operations to accommodate patient reengagement, leading them to increase investments in technology.

Take virtual check-in as an example. The pandemic pushed organizations to adopt technologies that streamlined processes and enabled patients to complete insurance forms before their appointment. Accenture's COVID-19 Consumer Health Experience Survey 2020 found that 74% of patients are now likely — and happy — to use online chat or texting to provide check-in information before their appointment.

Social media is also an important yet underutilized channel to connect with patients. NRC Health found that 62% of consumers say that they trust the health information they get from social media so long as it comes from healthcare providers. Social media consumers also prefer to seek out organizations for information—not the other way around. Providers who respect these parameters and leverage on-demand content are better positioned to create positive patient experiences, now and in the future.

But what about healthcare's obligations to prepare its workforce for changing patient expectations? Providers must offer better support for their clinical employees in this bold new world of virtual patient engagement. No doubt there's a clear need to up-skill and equip clinical staff with high-tech expertise. New models of education and training now use digital technologies, artificial intelligence (AI) and genomics to help providers design services benefitting the individual patient.

The Deloitte 2020 Survey of US Physicians found that 85 percent of medical professionals also require more training for virtual visit skills, especially as it relates to conveying empathy online. In effect, providers need help in developing a webside manner. Still, the pandemic has shown just how quickly providers can adapt to change. The latest technologies not only supercharge the work of physicians, but they augment best practices, too.

THE FUTURE GOT HERE YESTERDAY

Clearly, virtual care, and care on the patient's terms, is here to stay. But not all organizations have the technology and infrastructure to support breakthroughs in care delivery. The cloud, according to Accenture, is the foundation for digital transformation in healthcare. It allows connectivity across devices and systems in ways that will make the entire industry faster and more fluid. The cloud also helps provide a true long-term, comprehensive, inclusive view of a patient's health issues.

Technology has proven its ability to fill critical needs, and patients who have grown accustomed to it will continue to confidently engage it even when the world opens back up. Nonetheless, forming proactive, efficient, and integrated patient engagement processes today are paramount — before consumer expectations are set for providers by big-box and online retailers.

To be sure, technology is favoring only one type of patient — the one who is comfortable in and able to access a digital space. Providing a wider range of choices, including for those patients who prefer paper documents and conventional care, allows for ease of access. Patients are looking for providers who will respect their autonomy, communicate based on their preferences, and develop a two-way relationship for the long haul.



And it's likely that consumer pressure will continue to shape the patient experience long after the virus wanes. And providers need to take this to heart. The abundance of digital health content has enabled patients to come to them with relatively defined perspectives about their personal health. Patients expect a more collaborative approach to care and they're not shy about expressing their opinions. In fact, Accenture noted that in 2020, the number of patients willing to tell their clinicians they disagree with them was 51 percent. That's a major shift toward patient autonomy and away from blind trust.

Yet according to Experian's Patient Experience Forecast 2021, the relationship and rapport between patients and providers will grow stronger in the coming years. Patients will be more appreciative of the care they receive, especially during in-person visits, and providers will have greater empathy toward patients and their circumstances, both clinical and non-clinical.

This movement will come to define tomorrow's patient experience. Foremost, it will lead providers to embed patient preferences into operational decisions. And while some organizations might fill in the gap by engaging more patients in digital adoption, it will still be more beneficial to meet patients on their own terms.

Ultimately, the patient experience depends on the human connection, irrespective of mode or form. Retooling the delivery model will be necessary. Providers will need to continuously rethink how they connect with their patients through technology and in person. Technology should supplement and enhance the patient experience, not supplant the need for human interaction. After all, what patients value most is having a provider who genuinely cares for them, pandemic or not.



THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

According to NRC Health, patients who return time and again to their providers bolster revenues in a big way. One patient's lifetime health spending is worth about \$1.4 million per individual, or \$4.2 million per family. That's a significant incentive for providers to create longstanding relationships.

Patient loyalty has positive financial effects on a hospital's revenue cycle, too. This is especially true when it comes to specialized care, such as oncology, orthopedics and cardiology. Health systems make significant investments in Centers of Excellence to generate referrals and keep patients in their network. During the tough times, returning patients are the bedrock of downstream revenue.

Accenture's COVID-19 Consumer Health Experience Survey 2020 found that health systems that evolve to meet changing patient needs expedite financial recovery and capture new patients more quickly. This competitive advantage can increase their revenues by 5% to 10% of pre-COVID levels within 12 months. For a \$5 billion health system, that translates to between \$250 million and \$500 million in additional annual income.

But improving post-pandemic revenue depends on having well-planned patient communications in place. According to Accenture, all outreach should proactively — and in a personalized fashion — communicate the specific actions a health system has taken to protect patients and caregivers. For instance, standardized messages about new wellness protocols and practices can be woven throughout every touchpoint, from the website to email, to billing slips, patient portals, and phone system scripts.

Healthcare marketers can also help the system recover by continuing to build connected brand experiences. Consumers make informed decisions about where they go, which providers they see and who they're willing to trust with their health based on familiarity. By implementing consistent and relevant communications, marketers can help keep their brand top of mind when care is needed.

In the case of patient billing, consumers have high expectations about high tech payment methods. They want responsive, convenient, and transparent options similar to those offered by online retailers. Easier, more understandable payment options can help providers increase collections, improve patient satisfaction and optimize the revenue cycle. This is particularly important as self-pay now represents between 5% and 15% of a hospital's accounts receivable.

ABOUT REVATION SYSTEMS

At Revation Systems, we have a passion for making the complex simple and embracing risk to deliver great results. We have a security-first mindset and a purpose-built approach to everything we do from our policies and processes to our infrastructure and architecture. Security is at the core of our DNA; both at the organizational level and for the architecture of our technology. Security is not a check box for us, but rather an approach that starts from the ground up and influences every product we bring to market. We take the hard road every time to ensure our customer's data — in the two most tightly regulated markets — remains protected.

Our secure solutions have been validated with our HITRUST Certification. For financial providers, HITRUST certification means that the organization in question (including its products) has already undergone rigorous scrutiny and is a verified-secure partner whose technology and organization could leverage for its digital transformation without fear, hesitation, or time spent on an additional internal review.

We believe in the power of human relationships and that innovation in communication will connect people to help achieve financial security and live healthier lives. Revation Systems serves hundreds of healthcare and finance consumers in the U.S. with its all-in-one full contact center in the cloud with the ability to drive experience across digital and physical channels. LinkLive is unified communications software hosted in the cloud that offers a broad range of capabilities including rich digital messaging, a seamless ability to engage humans across physical and digital channels, and leading voice and video communications.

We offer the advanced, sophisticated capabilities are expected in a contact center like skills-based routing, session recording, workforce management, agent scheduling, and quality monitoring tools. We also offer a broad range of digital capabilities from chat, secure mail, and co-browsing to the ability for digital users to engage the physical channels and humans at a healthcare or banking organization. Since its founding in 2003, Revation has been dedicated to the belief that the quality of communications can be increased, while the costs and hassles can be decreased, using virtual communications with a cloud-based platform.

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