

PATIENTS VS CUSTOMERS

Healthcare providers are struggling to balance the delivery of quality care with maintaining advantage over increased competition.

5 Factors Are Forcing This Issue

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Provider compensation is tied to patient outcomes and satisfaction.
- 2

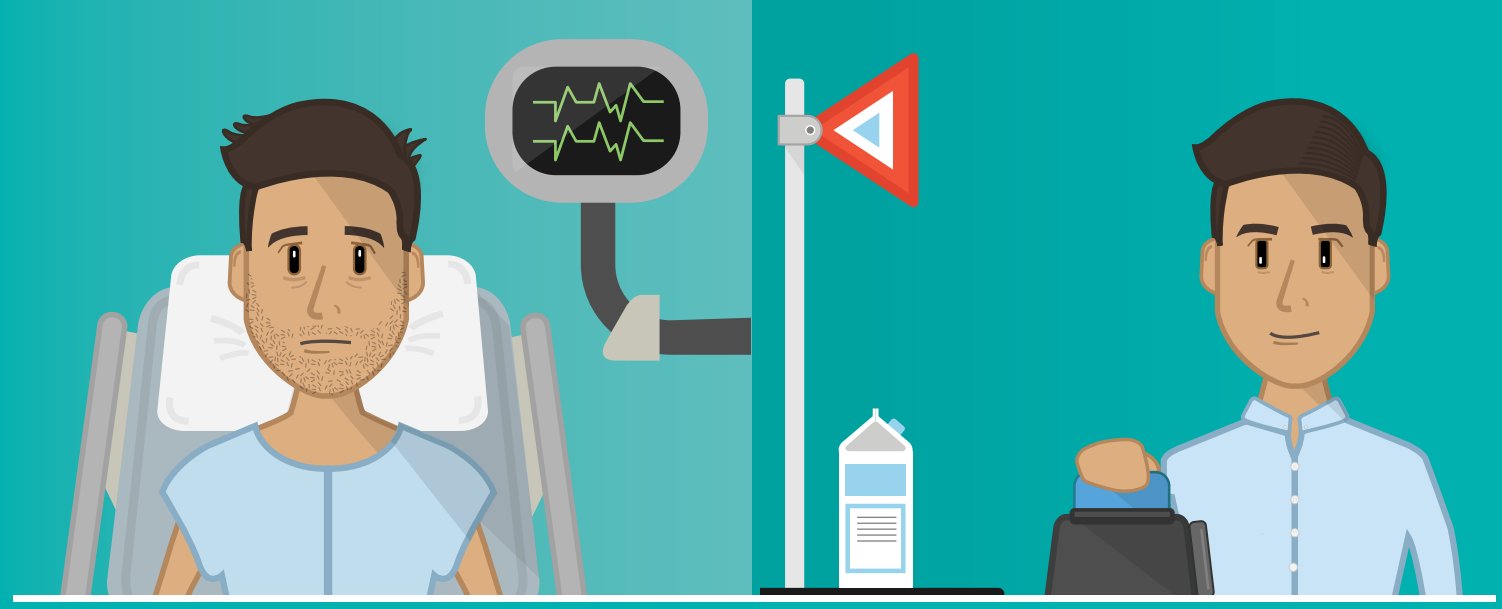
High deductible plans encourage shopping.
- 3

Health systems face more competition, from other health systems to retail clinics.
- 4

Online ratings are becoming increasingly important.
- 5

Individuals have higher service expectations from experiences outside of healthcare.

The idea of patient as customer has emerged, creating confusion around which label is the right fit and which needs should be prioritized.



Patient, *noun* – a sick individual especially when awaiting or under the care and treatment of a physician or surgeon.¹ This definition presents an individual in a passive light, with care providers in a paternalistic one.

Customer, *noun* - one that purchases a good or service.² This loaded label carries the perceptions of: a relentless push to achieve satisfaction, the power of the dollar, a "customer is always right" mentality, and the clean exchange of money for a product or service experience.

Delivering quality care is at the core of what a health system does.

How do you balance the needs of patients with increasing pressure to treat them as customers?

Jennifer
Age: 30 Condition: 2 Months Pregnant

Patient

"This is my first pregnancy, and I'm nervous. I want to be cared for."

Healthcare isn't just an exchange of funds for a service. People are seeking services to maintain their health and/or life, making the interaction far more complex and lengthy than a transaction, such as purchasing a TV at big box retailer.

Customer

"I deserve convenience. I want access to the closest, best hospital."

Due to an individual's insurance network, funds, location, referral, and/or immediacy of her health state, where she receives care isn't always a "choice," unlike a customer choosing one restaurant over another.



In times of uncertainty, individuals are looking for timely support. What if what was top of mind for an individual were top of mind for the provider, building a sense of convenience and trust?

Allimay
Age: 48 Condition: Stage 3 Breast Cancer

Patient

"I don't feel like myself. I'm nauseous, constantly getting stuck with needles, and I'm scared. I want to go back to my normal life."

Seeking or receiving care—regardless of how luxurious or enjoyable providers strive to make it—is not fun. This translates to people wanting to end their interactions with a healthcare provider as quickly as possible.³

Customer

"I want access to the latest and greatest, with all the amenities included."

Studies have shown that hospital amenities have a greater impact on the hospital where people choose to receive their care than clinical quality. It's far easier to place value on a familiar tactical element than it is an abstract clinical outcome.^{4,5}



Dealing with a medical event is scary and makes people feel vulnerable, creating a need for access to trusted knowledge and a caring environment. What if providers treated individuals as part of the care team, co-creating care plans with their perspectives in mind, building comfort and understanding?

Fred
Age: 88 Condition: Glaucoma, Memory Loss, Type 2 Diabetes, Hip Replaced, and COPD

Patient

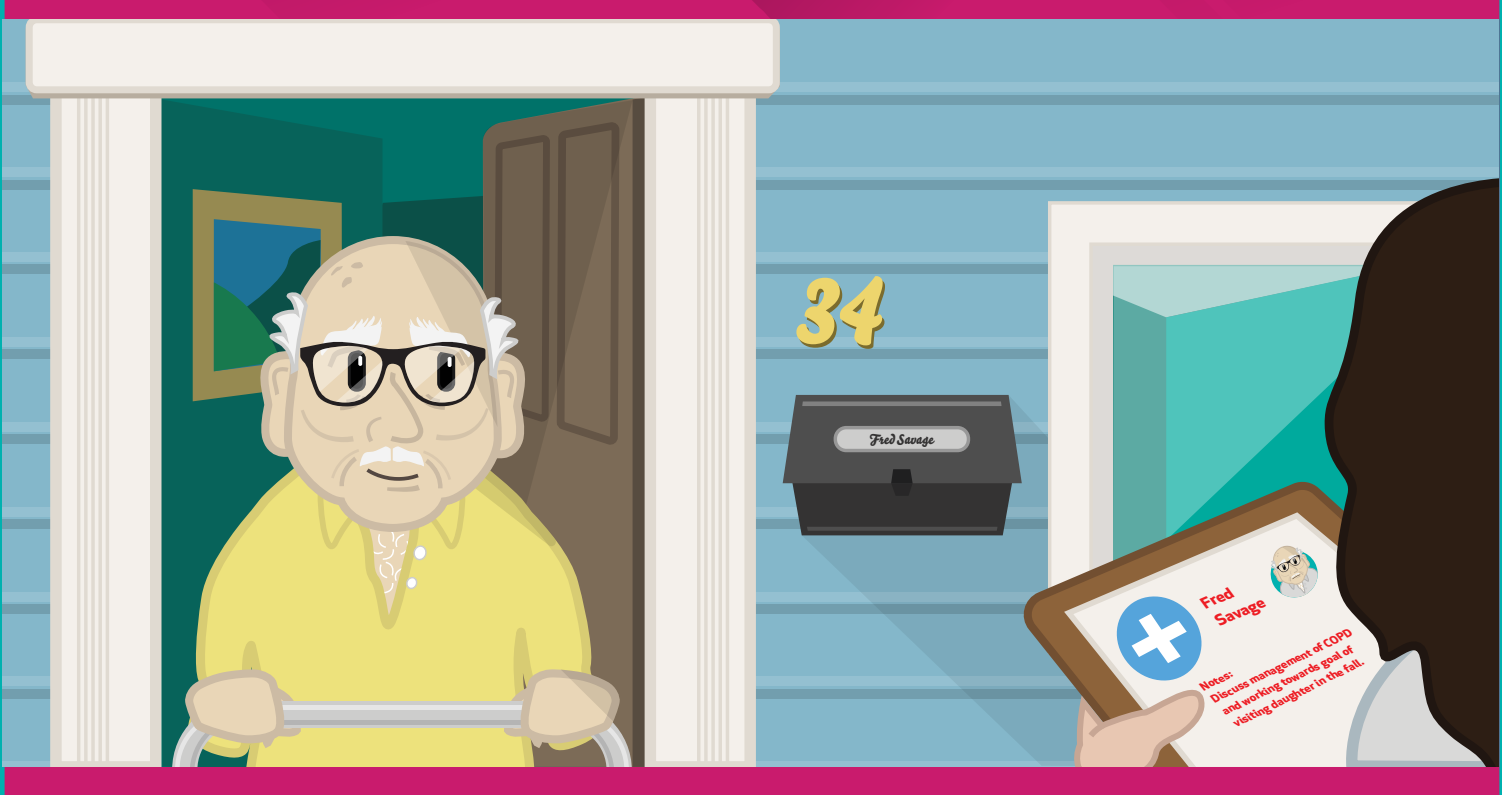
"I feel like my body is slowing down, and I can't control it. I need someone to show me what to do."

There isn't always a clean exchange of money between the person receiving care and a doctor or hospital because of the presence of a middleman — insurance — making the person sometimes less onerous over the interaction.

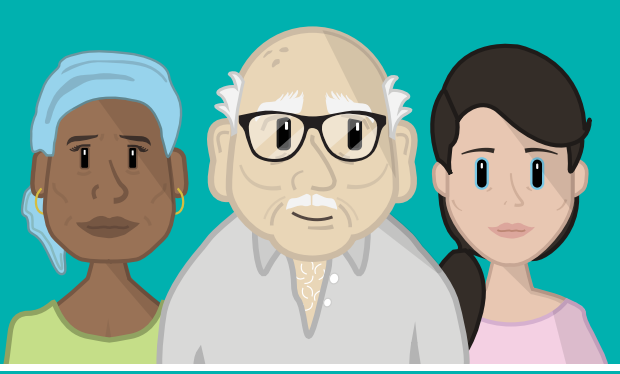
Customer

"I want to do what I want for as long as I can. It's my life and my body."

Individuals seeking care may form their opinions on what's right for them based on reading an article, advice they got from friends, or what's easiest, to name a few.



People oftentimes see health differently from the way a clinician might, and may find managing conditions within certain parameters abstract. What if providers worked to meet patients where they were, to best align what matters to the individual with what is needed clinically, building engagement and loyalty?



Care for them as individuals.

Stop focusing on the label and start focusing on the individual. Let the medical and emotional needs and beliefs of the people you serve drive the interactions.

How else can providers better understand the individuals they serve? **Read more.**



www.continuuminnovation.com

¹ Merriam-Webster. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/patient>

² Merriam-Webster. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/customer>

³ Customer service vs. Patient care. <http://psjournal.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1045&context=journal>

⁴ Hospitals as Hotels: The Role of Patient Amenities in Hospital Demand. Cambridge: National Bureau of Economic Research. 2008. Print.

⁵ Should hospitals treat patients as customers, partners or both? <http://www.beckershospitalreview.com/strategic-planning/should-hospitals-treat-patients-as-customers-partners-or-both.html>

⁶ The Problem with Satisfied Patients. <http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2015/04/the-problem-with-satisfied-patients/390684/>

⁷ Should hospitals treat patients as customers, partners or both? <http://www.beckershospitalreview.com/strategic-planning/should-hospitals-treat-patients-as-customers-partners-or-both.html>