



Elevating the Humanity in Healthcare

A Study on the Perceptions of Human-Centric Care in
the U.S. Healthcare System

Hill & Knowlton

About This Report

In an era of rapid medical advancement, healthcare is at risk of losing its humanity.

Technological strides, for all their efficiencies, strain personal connections and empathy. Our healthcare workforce grapples with time constraints and demanding workloads. The promise of personalized medicine faces counterbalances from cost pressures; administrative burdens compromise individualized care. Hierarchical dynamics, communication barriers, care fragmentation – it's a Jenga tower ready to topple.

Against this backdrop, reclaiming the warmth that makes healing an art remains critical. Encouragingly, a collective acknowledgment is growing, recognizing

the profound link between a humanistic provider-patient relationship and elevated patient well-being.¹

As the global communications leader for transformation, Hill & Knowlton (H&K) partners with companies to inform, engage and build trust for healthcare solutions. To further our insights, we set out to assess U.S. adults' perceptions on the state of humanity in healthcare, including obstacles and opportunities.

Here we present the findings, coupled with insights from academic literature, in hopes that it furthers the dialogue on *elevating the humanity in healthcare* towards optimal care and better health outcomes for people everywhere.



Our Methodology

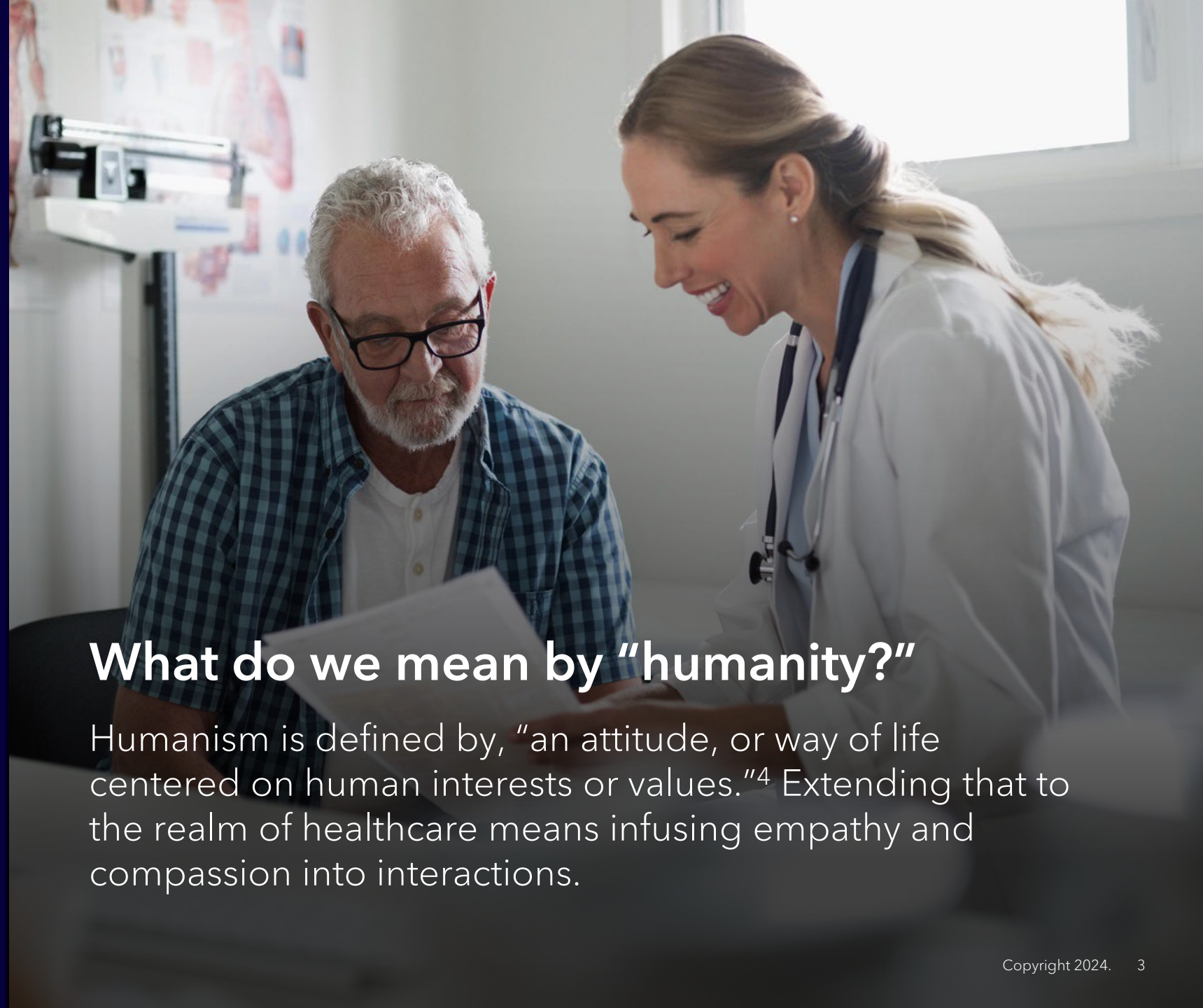
1,046 U.S. adults surveyed aged 18 and older.²

♀ 50% female

♂ 50% male

10 years' worth of academic literature analyzed.³

Using "compassionate care" – as a proxy for humanity in healthcare – we reviewed and synthesized the past decade (2013-2023) of relevant literature in the National Library of Medicine's PubMed® database.



What do we mean by "humanity?"

Humanism is defined by, "an attitude, or way of life centered on human interests or values."⁴ Extending that to the realm of healthcare means infusing empathy and compassion into interactions.

Patients feel compassion from:⁵

- Kindness, authenticity, attentiveness
- Acceptance, understanding, listening
- Helping, communicating effectively
- Being involved, forming a relational connection, displaying presence and warmth, being gentle and caring

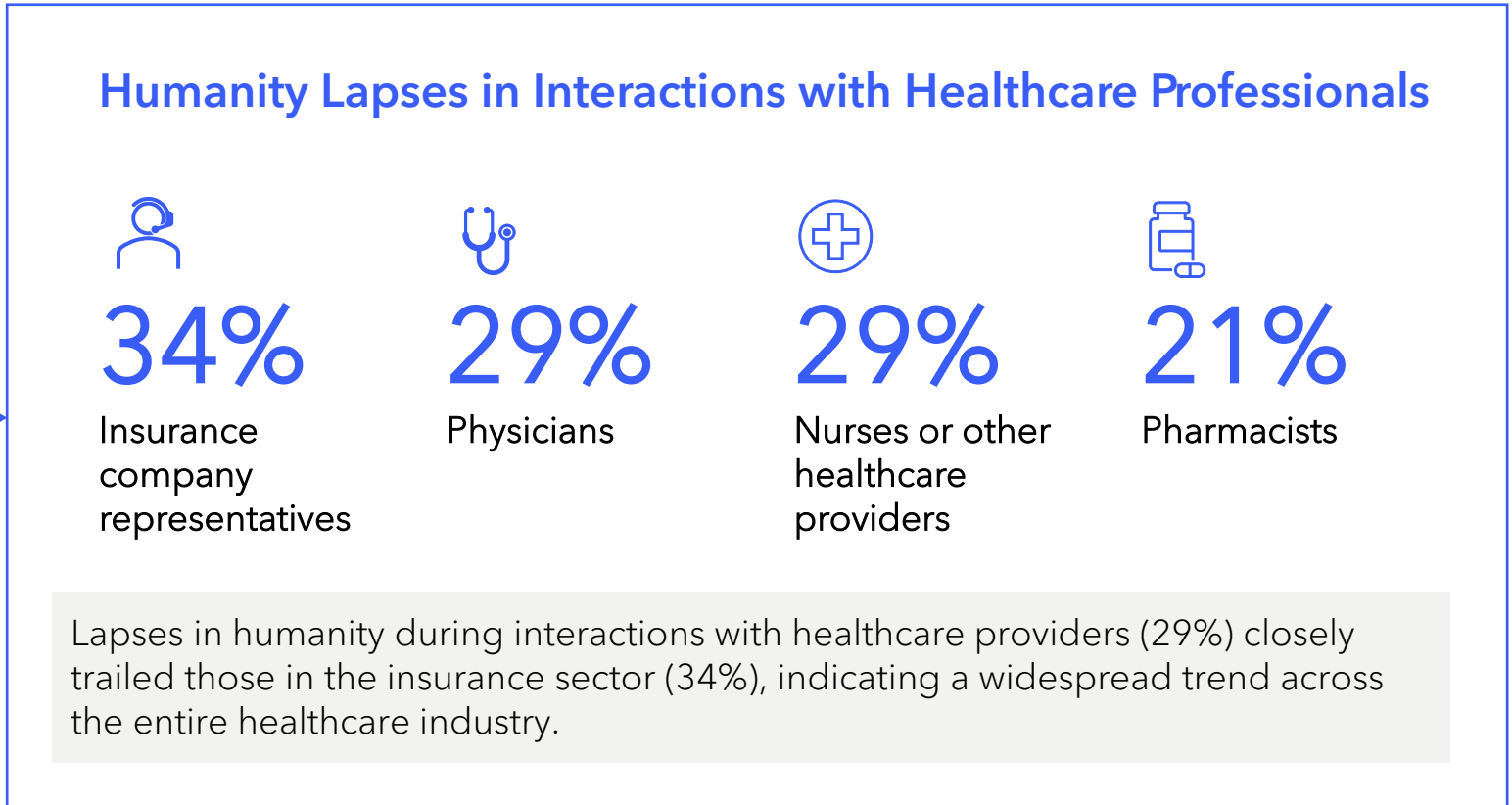
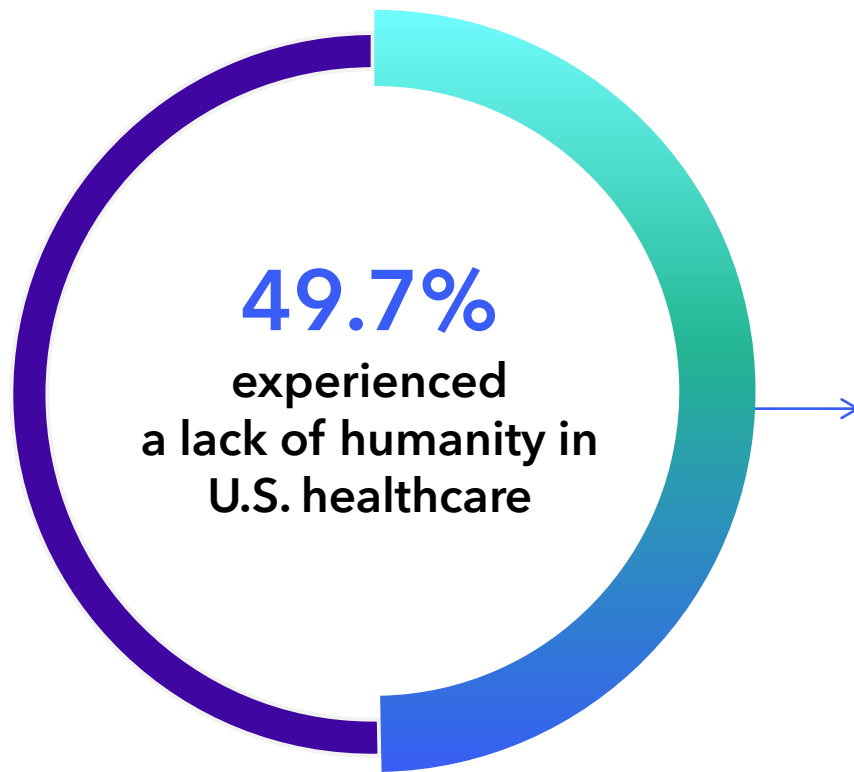


Healthcare providers show compassion by:^{5,6}

- Desire to relieve suffering in others
- Sensitivity to patient preferences
- Ascribing higher purpose to daily duties

Calling for Change

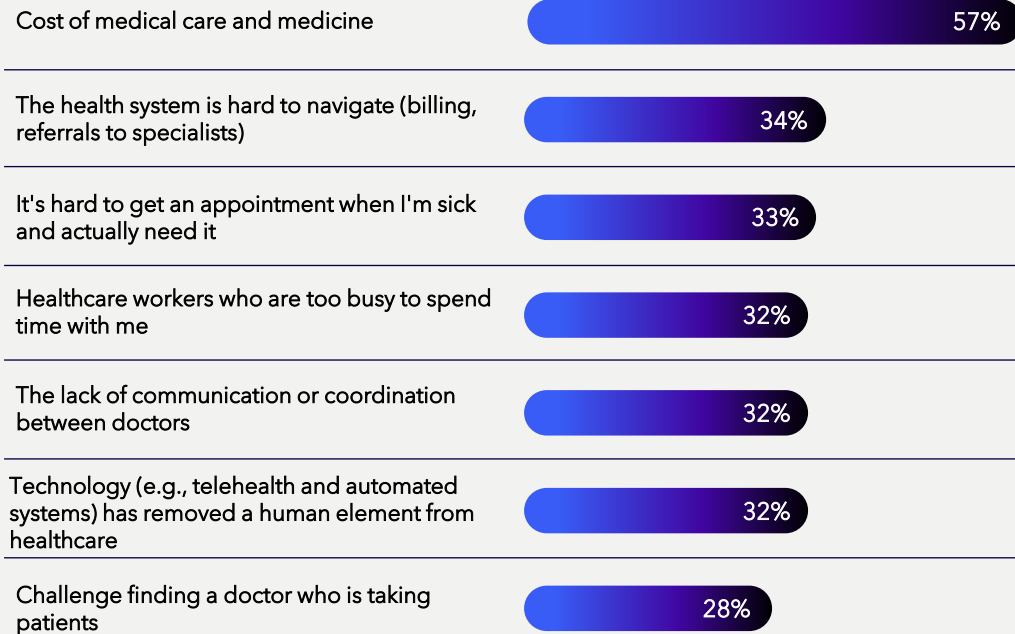
Nearly half of all respondents (49.7%) report they (or someone they care for) have experienced a lack of humanity from their interactions with the healthcare system.



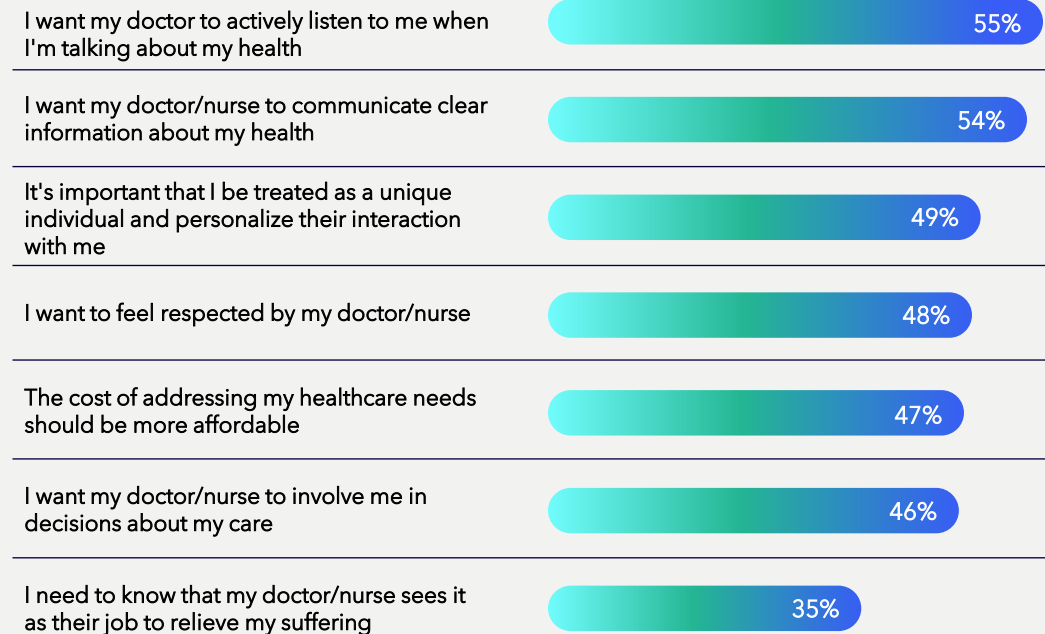
Pinpointing the Pain Points

When asked about barriers to human-centered care, U.S. adults identified cost and navigating the healthcare system as challenges. However, when asked what it meant to be treated with humanity, cost ranked fifth behind active listening, clear communication, personalized care, and respect. Despite citing cost as an obstacle, respondents **prioritized interpersonal aspects over financial considerations** in defining a more humane healthcare experience.

Barriers to Human-Centered Care



Define Being Treated with Humanity (As a Whole Human)



On the Matter of Generational Viewpoints...

60%

of younger adults
(Generation Z and Millennials)
reported experiencing a lack of
humanity, compared to...

26%

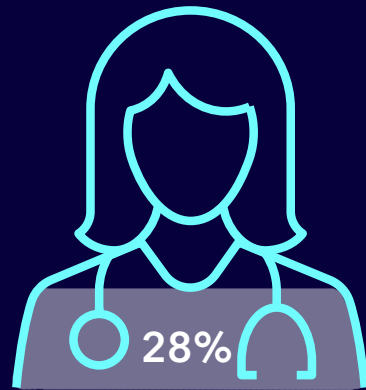
of older adults.
This upends the assumption that
digital natives would
automatically embrace a
technology-forward healthcare
environment.

The Trending Direction of Humanity Across Healthcare

Hill & Knowlton's Survey Findings

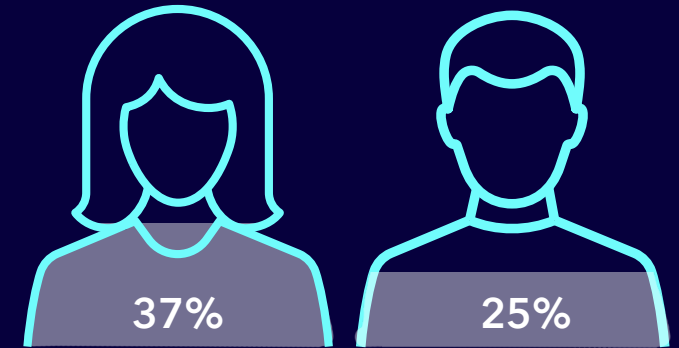
Importantly, survey results are not a critique of healthcare providers but reflect broader challenges: increasing patient loads, limited resources, workforce shortages.

1 in 3



individuals (28%) working in healthcare readily acknowledge a decline in the level of humanity in healthcare. Constraints on our current healthcare system undermine the ability to show compassion and engage in effective communication.

31%



of the entire respondent pool – regardless of whether they work in or outside of healthcare – echo this sentiment. All age groups had similar perceptions, with **women (37%)** perceiving a decline in the level of humanity in healthcare slightly more than **men (25%)**.



Cultivating Compassion

Debate abounds on the teachability of compassion, with research positing that improving workplace conditions and culture is more effective for fostering compassionate care than focusing on boosting an individual's personal attributes.⁷

This underscores the **necessity of change at the organizational level** of hospitals and healthcare systems before filtering down to individual practitioners.

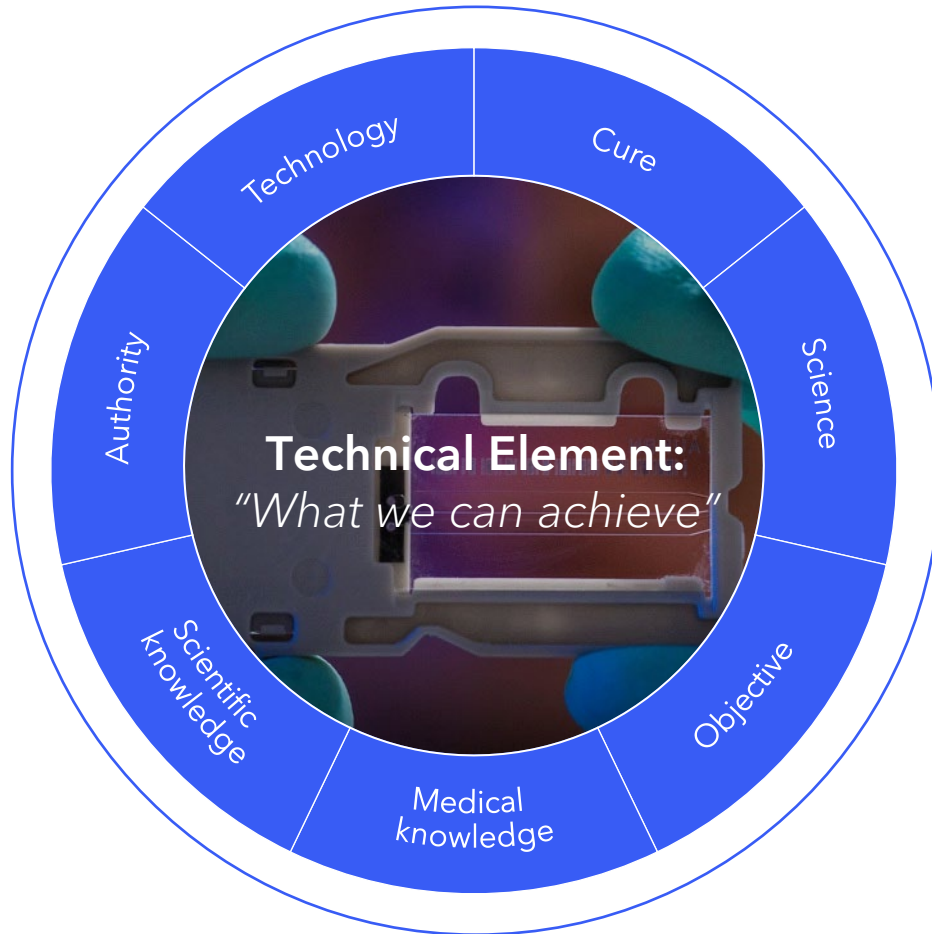
The Role of Technology

Technological integration, while offering benefits such as data standardization, raised concerns among medical graduate students about its **potential negative impact on compassionate, patient-centered care**.⁸

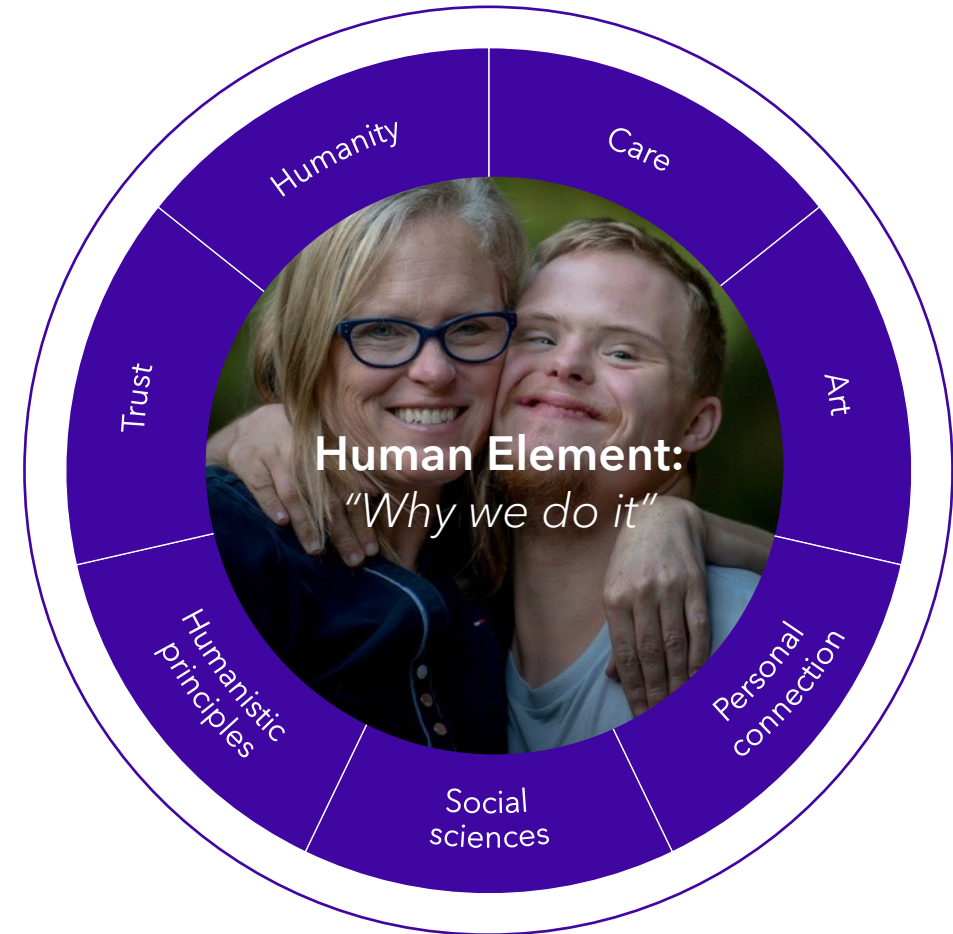
In determining future uses of technology in the care environment, providers should return to the central importance of the patient perspective. And while the patient perspective remains paramount, **a striking absence of patient and family voices** exists in compassion research, signaling the need for increased inclusion in ongoing study design.^{5,9}

A Warring Duality

There's a clear duality between technical knowledge and the human element in medicine. While scientific progress is crucial, failure to strike a balance with humanistic principles means losing sight of the essential goals of medicine to maintain a human connection buoyed by empathy and support.^{10,11,12}



V.S.



Where Do We Go from Here?

Survey responses and academic literature confirm perceptions of a widespread lack of humanity in healthcare interactions, transcending generations.

Both patients and healthcare professionals acknowledge this issue, constrained by a system that perpetuates it.

In this entrenched scenario, communication initiatives emerge as a viable avenue for immediate change, guided by the principles gleaned from this review...



1 Acknowledge Humanity Deficits Without Blame

Recognize that no single party is solely responsible, nor can they provide a complete solution. Frame challenges as opportunities for positive transformation through collaborative efforts.



2 Amplify Voices of All Ages/Cultures

Push for increased inclusion of patient and family perspectives to ensure healthcare solutions align with the needs and values of those directly impacted.

3 Champion Human-Centric Design in Technology

Ensure that technological advancements enhance, rather than detract from, the human connection in healthcare; facilitate communications that break down technology use barriers.



In Pursuit of *Elevating the Humanity in Healthcare...*

Hill & Knowlton recognizes the crucial role communication plays in shaping the healthcare ecosystem. What's more, we know the healthcare revolution is only transformational if it reaches everyone. And we know that *how* healthcare advancements reach people is nearly as important as the innovations, themselves.

Through responsible storytelling and advocacy, we aspire to inspire transformative change that positively impacts healthcare system and, most importantly, the people they serve.

Acknowledging the intricate challenges within the healthcare system, our intention is to foster understanding and collaboration. Rather than placing undue burden on any one party, we advocate for collective efforts to address the systemic issues that hinder the delivery of compassionate care. Let us embark, together, on a path toward a more empathetic and human-centric future.



1 Recognize
Humanity Deficits
without Blame



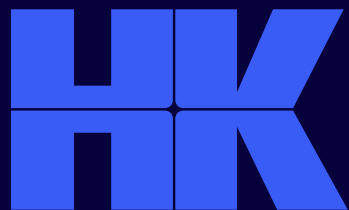
2 Amplify Voices of
All Ages and
Cultures



3 Champion Human-
Centric Design in
Technology

"Wherever the
art of Medicine
is loved,
there is also
a love of
Humanity. "

- Hippocrates



To learn more about how we're *elevating the humanity in healthcare* through communications,
please contact: Brenna.Terry@hillandknowlton.com

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