

Patient Experience Trends In A Hypercompetitive Healthcare Landscape

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No customer experiences carry higher stakes than those between patients and healthcare organizations. With immense medical and financial ramifications, such interactions can have the potential to dramatically impact lives.

But in a rather unfortunate irony, efforts to transform patient experiences have often lacked the urgency present even in lower-stakes, more transactional industries. Whereas quintessential retail and consumer brands have ensured shoppers can effortlessly process returns or access technical support at any time, healthcare establishments have long subjected patients to convoluted journeys devoid of personalization, transparency, and empathy.

The tide is beginning to turn.

Thanks to the rise of virtual care, the emergence of disruptive provider models, and the vast accessibility of ratings and reviews, patients have never had more options for evaluating and selecting the best providers. Healthcare organizations, in turn, face unprecedented pressure to elevate their patient journeys.



“Looking forward, healthcare organizations need to respond to consumerism and other industry trends by adopting customer experience and relationship management best practices from traditional business-to-consumer industries. They need to approach every interaction as an opportunity to improve the patient relationship, or risk losing the patient to another provider.” - **Scott Kendrick, VP of Strategy, CallMiner**

What are patients demanding in the increasingly competitive medical space? What solutions will empower providers to achieve patient centricity? This special report provides the answers.

Familiar Trends, Unprecedented Stakes | Defining a Great Patient Experience in 2022

In one sense, the optimal patient experience mirrors the elements found in stellar experiences across other industries. Concepts like “personalization” and “omnichannel,” which set the tone for customer relationships in fields like retail and consumer goods, are also essential in healthcare.

The unrivaled stakes, considerable nuances, and evolving expectations of patient interactions, however, require providers to approach these initiatives in a special light. The defining elements of a great patient experience follow.

Quality of Care Experience

It may seem futile to hold patient experience strategists accountable for quality of care. After all, few patient experience teams have the power to instantly cultivate rosters of more capable medical practitioners. Plus, even the best doctors face very real limitations in terms of how they can treat the specific ailments affecting specific patients.

Focus on quality is nonetheless *essential* for a provider in today’s hypercompetitive healthcare landscape. It remains the #1 factor by which patients assess providers; one simply cannot manage a patient relationship without vivid insight into the efficacy of the treatment.

It is worth noting that care begins prior to the patient reaching the evaluation room, operating table or dental chair; patient-centric providers ensure they are constantly capturing the right details, identifying medical red flags, providing accurate guidance, and directing patients to the best doctors and treatment plans.



Additionally, the quality of the care experience concerns more than the actual medical procedure. Factors like bedside manner, care environment and aftercare engagement, which are all very controllable, play an enormous role in driving patient comfort, satisfaction, and loyalty.



“According to a survey conducted by Press Ganey, aside from quality of care, the biggest influencers on loyalty and positive ratings include quality of patient service, communication, and provider bedside manner.” - **Scott Kendrick, CallMiner**

Quality is only gaining significance amid the rise of telehealth and other innovative care experiences. With more variance in terms of treatment, care style, and facility, patients simultaneously have more ability to shop for the best care experience and more questions about which care options they can trust in their personal situation.

Customer-Driven Digital Transformation

From patient portals to multimedia telehealth engagements, digital experiences are increasingly prevalent in today’s medical landscape. Only some digital experiences, however, contribute favorably to patient satisfaction.

Mindful that medical engagements are inherently stressful and complex, the best digital interactions emphasize simplicity. They afford patients seamless access to appointments, test results, billing, customer support, care providers, and telehealth services. The platforms themselves are also intuitive, ensuring that patients do not have to spend time “learning” something that is supposed to add convenience.

As it stands, patient confusion is a major bottleneck on the growth of telehealth services.



“Another survey published by J.D. Power noted the three top complaints by patients about telehealth include limited services (availability), lack of cost awareness and confusing technology requirements.” - **Scott Kendrick, CallMiner**

Even as they provide the requisite patient education, providers recognize that digital adoption will not happen overnight. In turn, they still provide seamless access to a live agent or in-person support for those who need it.

Transparent, High-Value Communication

Digital technology does not simply make it easier for patients to receive and pay for their care. It also makes it easier for them to understand and evaluate every facet of the experience.

From learning about ailments and care strategies online, to assessing alternative providers and treatment options before booking an appointment, to reviewing the ins-and-outs of each bill they receive, patients are scrutinizing every interaction with their providers. Those dissatisfied will not only argue on the phone or threaten to take their business elsewhere, they will share their negative feedback with their families, friends, and across public platforms.

As patient centricity moves to the forefront, the days of unnecessary procedures, overtreatment, and mysterious fees are coming to an end.

Today, providers are facing pressure to provide transparency at every step of the journey. Whether related to appointment scheduling, wait times, prognoses, available treatment options, doctor credentials, and billing, customers are holding healthcare organizations accountable for fair, honest, and open communication.

Patients are demanding *relevant* communication. Dealing with so much noise and complexity in their everyday lives, the last thing they want is an abundance of aggressively salesy or otherwise superfluous engagement from a medical provider. All communication, be it proactive or reactive, should respect the patient's time and feelings.



Human-Centric Personalization

Savvy customer experience professionals have long recognized that personalization is a spectrum. It does not always require the most intimately “personal” conversations; often, it only means recognizing customers and allowing them to engage in their preferred channels.

Patient experiences do, however, often require an intimate form of personalization. They require providers who not only know but express legitimate compassion for patients and their preferences, sentiments, specific lifestyle, medical, and financial situations.

Medical care in the United States may ultimately be a business, but patient-centric providers refuse to let any aspect of the journey feel transactional. Through precise recognition of patient identities and needs, human-centric engagement strategies, and incredible flexibility of policies, they consistently and irrefutably send the message that the patient’s wellness comes first.

Empathy In Every Context

Empathy involves working to understand - and adapt to - a patient’s unique circumstance. Contrary to common belief, it is not always a highly emotional exercise.

Make no mistake, patients who are enduring serious ailments, stressing over an upcoming diagnosis, or staring at an intimidating medical bill often will require emotional support and compassion. They will gravitate toward providers in which all employees, from the contact center to the billing department to the operating room, demonstrate genuine empathy.

On the other hand, some patients are specifically looking to avoid lengthy, intimate conversations. In these cases, empathy involves honoring that preference by providing the necessary convenience, simplicity, or privacy.

When executed correctly, virtual services can reflect this form of empathy. Telehealth empowers patients to receive access to care in a manner that promotes speed, flexibility, and privacy – three factors that matter greatly in modern society. Digital pharmacies allow patients to receive private care for ailments that may involve stigma or awkwardness, freeing them from the discomfort of an in-person appointment.

As agents are trained, billing processes established, and digital journeys designed, providers will need to let empathy guide their efforts. They must pursue initiatives that reflect a clear understanding of customer needs, feelings, and expectations.

Unified Patient Journey

Even the most basic patient interactions involve multiple steps and often involve interactions with multiple different parties. These different phases cannot, however, feel fragmented. Today's patients are demanding a seamless, consistent medical journey.

The best providers ensure that patients never have to repeat information as they move between different contact channels or phases of the care process. All employees instantly recognize the patient and their issue, in turn delivering contextually relevant support at all times, across all channels.

Equally importantly, they cultivate an aura of consistency so that patients never feel as if they are talking to different companies – with different priorities – when they move about the journey. Providers should work to “own” as much of the service process as they can, often freeing patients from the burden of interacting with external parties (like insurance companies or testing facilities). Patients tend to evaluate providers based on the total experience, and savvy healthcare organizations want to have complete control over that perception.



Steps to Success | Delivering a Great Patient Experience in 2022 and Beyond

When it comes to delivering a great patient experience, providers are facing a range of challenges. With patient health, market trust, referral business, and reimbursement income all on the line, providers cannot afford to settle for half-measures.



“Healthcare organizations have historically struggled to resolve these issues in part due to a lack of centralized ownership of the patient experience, and moreover, a lack of tools and the insight needed to understand and prioritize the required improvements.”

- **Scott Kendrick, CallMiner**

Fortunately, solutions to even the most enduring patient experience challenges do exist.

Centralize Ownership of the Patient Experience

Given the unprecedented stakes, patient experience can no longer be a fragmented endeavor; the entire organization must work collectively to optimize every facet of the journey.

To achieve this reality, successful healthcare organizations will centralize ownership of the patient experience. Led by a Chief Patient Experience Officer (or equivalent), this function will establish and then unify the entire organization around a clear strategic vision.



“Recently, some forward-looking providers have established a new role, the Chief Patient Experience Officer (CXO), which stewards the entire healthcare organization towards improved experiences. By consolidating the efforts under one title, providers can take a more streamlined approach to solving these issues.”

- **Scott Kendrick, CallMiner**

By democratizing patient intelligence, unifying systems and processes, cultivating a patient-centric culture, and establishing relevant performance benchmarks, this leader will eliminate any confusion or disagreement about how teams can unite to elevate patient relationships.

Adopt and Leverage Robust Voice of Patient Analytics

There is a simple solution for identifying the type of experience patients want to achieve: deeply understanding every patient interaction. Indeed, successful providers are leveraging modern, AI-driven analytics solutions to capture and democratize actionable insights from every phase of the patient journey. They are then using this intelligence to take action, elevating every interaction – and every aspect of their operation.

At the interaction level, robust intelligence can help providers identify and comfort patients who are anxious or highly emotional about the medical or account management issue they are facing. It can also uncover sentiment about the quality of the support experience, helping agents make real-time adjustments to their tone and overall approach.



“Technologies, such as conversation intelligence, can automatically monitor patient conversations to identify patient emotion and sentiment, and in turn, identify when empathy is required. For example, if a patient calls in to make an appointment for a particularly sensitive issue or needs to schedule a high-risk procedure, empathy may support those conversations. With the right tools, healthcare organizations can not only identify the conversations in which empathy is needed, but also which agents are responding appropriately.” - **Scott Kendrick, CallMiner**

By identifying words that may speak to an emergency medical condition, modern analytics can even play a direct role in elevating quality of care.





“Conversations, such as those that happen when a patient calls to make or reschedule an appointment, can be analyzed for “code red” words, such as symptoms that can indicate a potentially dangerous condition. In such situations an agent can be prompted to triage and route that call to a certified health professional – advanced analytics can act as a second line of defense to prompt agents to take the necessary immediate action.” - **Scott Kendrick, CallMiner**

Another critical use case involves identifying patients who present a risk of non-payment, negative reviews, or transition to another provider. With such data at their fingertips, providers can proactively remedy such issues while strengthening patient relationships in the process.

Actionable intelligence can just as effectively help providers make big picture changes, such as orchestrating journeys to avoid common pain points, correcting slow processes and technologies, and optimizing proactive and follow-up communication. One strong use case concerns employees. With robust insight into the overall experience, providers can better tailor recruiting, training, and performance management to the true reality of the operation and the actual needs and expectations of the patient base.



“By tracking these conversations, agent training and coaching can be improved as well to drive the desired behavior. This can be accomplished through automated performance feedback based on analysis and automatic scoring of the interactions, and through real-time prompts, gently and automatically nudging agents to deliver empathy at critical moments. This will ensure your patients feel heard and supported, and improve the overall patient experience.” - **Scott Kendrick, CallMiner**

Since modern analytics solutions collect, unify, and analyze data from all conversations and behaviors in all touch points, organizations will know for certain that they have accurate portraits of individual patients and the journey at large.



“This is the number one thing we wanted; something automated to understand the patient experience in a faster and more accurate way. Before CallMiner, we were doing patient surveys and manual quality assessments, and that just doesn’t offer the same level of actionable insights ... We don’t [even] need to ask the patient how they feel. They tell you by the way they respond to the agents during interactions. It’s amazing what you get when you just listen.” - **Sabine Harrison, Contact Center Director, Kelsey-Seybold Clinic**

Make Proactive Engagement the New Standard

With access to analytics for all patient interactions in all channels, organizations gain the opportunity to understand customer intentions, anticipate needs, and forecast potential problems. Successful providers seize this opportunity by making proactive engagement the centerpiece of their patient experience.

Proactive engagement can take on numerous forms in the healthcare space, and the savviest organizations pursue all of them:

- **Proactive communication:** Examples may include reminding patients of a scheduled checkup, alerting them to an address or doctor change, or advising them about a greater-than-usual wait time
- **Proactive care:** Examples may include briefing patients on experimental treatments or providing preventative care tips to those with certain warning signs
- **Proactive support:** Examples may include reaching out to patients who had a contentious interaction with a doctor or missed an appointment
- **Proactive revenue management:** Examples may include alerting patients to payment plan options or providing pre-emptive discounts to patients who would otherwise be non-payment risks

In all cases, the communication is transparent, honest, and empathetic.



Emphasize Thoughtful Digital Transformation

To ensure technology becomes an aid rather than a burden, leading providers let data drive their digital transformation.

More specifically, they look at existing pain points and inefficiencies and ensure their new tools are providing effective remedies. Examples may include using bots to automatically schedule appointments or collect symptoms from patients who are unwilling to share them with a live agent.

Regardless of use case, all digital technology must integrate with core patient experience systems to ensure a seamless, personalized experience. Patients should never have to exert additional effort to access their account, and agents should never be in the dark about the patients and ailments they are supporting.

When the value and relevance of digital technology is clear, patients will more frequently (and enthusiastically) use the new platforms for appropriate issues. Live employees, in turn, can focus on the interactions that require a higher touch. All patients will ultimately receive the best care possible, leading to a more efficient and patient-centric operation.

Simplify the Payment Process

The costs of medical care is discouraging however you look at it, but particularly when it is unclear or exploitative. When facing unexpected or confusing bills, customers and insurers are less likely to pay – adversely affecting short-term revenue for providers. Patients also lose trust in the provider, which has a negative impact on long-term success.



“The patient financial experience continues to be a pain point. It’s no surprise that a positive clinical experience can be wiped out by a poor financial experience, which can be the reason a patient finds another provider or tells family and friends to look elsewhere.” - **Scott Kendrick, CallMiner**

Simplifying the payment process, in turn, represents a pivotal priority for all healthcare organizations.

Like all meaningful experience transformations, the process begins with data analysis. By identifying which patients pose the greatest risk of non-payment, which procedures or billing items tend to compound that risk, and which parts of the billing process drive the most effort, firms can optimize pricing and improve revenue cycle management.

Leading providers will be the ones that commit to continuously improving the payment process. From creating seamless digital payment portals, to introducing appealing payment plans, to simplifying billing codes, to appropriately communicating cost realities throughout the care process, they reduce the friction and skepticism associated with healthcare billing. In turn, they heighten the chance of patients happily and completely participating in the payment cycle.

Set the Right Patient Satisfaction Standards

When patient support representatives, billing specialists, and medical practitioners endure mixed messages about the importance of certain metrics, they are unable to consistently align with the company vision and deliver patient-centric support.

To mitigate this problem, the best providers ensure patient satisfaction stands as the #1 priority. They simultaneously build a company-wide emphasis on CAHPS, Press Ganey, and Leapfrog assessments. With their eyes set on those survey results, employees are not only clearer on what they need to do, but are better capable of predicting how certain issues will favorably or unfavorably impact their score.



“At the end of the day, patient satisfaction is a key metric for healthcare organizations. Being able to leverage data directly from patient interactions to understand patient's concerns ahead of surveys, like CAHPS, Press Ganey, and Leapfrog, can make it possible to predict scores, anticipate reimbursements and impact the bottom line.”

- **Scott Kendrick, CallMiner**



About the Author



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Brian Cantor is the principal analyst and director for CCW Digital, the global online community and research hub for customer contact professionals. In his role, Brian leads the customer experience, contact center, technology and employee engagement research initiatives that drive CCW Digital's complete portfolio of content.

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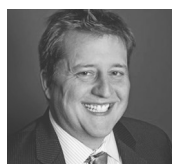


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