



COVID TOP 10

Best Practices for COVID-19 Patient Communication

The tactical playbook for reaching your patients with vital information on appointments, telehealth, testing, and more during the pandemic.

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WELL Health is uniquely suited to provide broad scale communications regarding COVID-19, improving operational efficiency and patient experience. WELL's intelligent communications hub is the only two-way digital health solution engaging patients throughout their entire care experience. It enables conversations between patients and their providers through secure, multilingual messaging in the patient's preferred communications channel: texting, email, telephone, and live chat.

"At Cedars-Sinai, we are actively working to ensure the health and safety of our patients, community and staff by keeping everyone informed of the latest information regarding COVID-19. WELL has been instrumental in helping us deploy timely communication to our scheduled patients with a digital agility we previously didn't have."

Darren Dworkin

Senior Vice President of Enterprise Information Services and Chief Information Officer at Cedars-Sinai.

Health systems around the U.S. have experienced a dramatic increase in patient communication since March 2020, including answering patient questions and concerns, managing appointment cancellation rates as high as 80 percent, and converting as many as 40 percent of appointments to telehealth.

Call centers were ill-suited to manage the increased call volume. The result has been long hold times, staff frustration, and decreased access to care. Emergency room visits plummeted by 50 percent nationwide and a third of Americans delayed or avoided medical care because they feared contracting the virus.

WELL provides a scalable, sustainable method for handling urgent communication and reassuring patients that it's safe to seek care.

65% increase in inbound patient messages between the start of the pandemic and October 2020.

270% increase in send message API calls among clients, indicating an increase in MyChart messages.

50x increase in telehealth visits from February to March 2020 among some WELL clients

This white paper provides best-practices developed for reaching patients about the coronavirus. It includes strategies currently employed by WELL's healthcare partners and clients in collaboration with our client success team.



1

Provide a virtual waiting room

Provide a virtual, touchless waiting room to alleviate patient fears of contracting and transmitting COVID-19 while waiting in a waiting room. The virtual waiting room allows patients to text their provider upon arrival and then wait safely in their car until the provider is ready to see them. It also accommodates digital patient intake forms and touchless payment options.

WORKFLOW:

1. An hour before the appointment, the patient receives a reminder message with instructions to wear a mask and to text when they arrive.
2. When the patient arrives at the provider location, they send a text indicating they have arrived.
3. The provider sends an automated confirmation response.
4. The patient waits in their car until they receive a text message indicating that a room is ready
5. When it's time for the patient to come in...

2

Support telehealth visits

Use text messaging to improve patient adoption of (and onboarding to) telehealth appointments in the same way your staff welcomes patients for in-person visits.

WELL offers a scalable, effective method for converting existing appointments to telehealth, onboarding patients to virtual visits, managing appointment delays, and providing support when patients have technical questions.

Telehealth onboarding

Download Instructions for Telehealth App

Send an Instant Automation when visits are switched from in-person to virtual, inviting patients to download instructions for the telehealth service and encouraging them to text #HELP if they are having issues.

Example:

*Thank you for scheduling your virtual visit with us. Please download the telehealth app from the following link and be prepared for your visit five minutes early. Respond to this message with #HELP if you have questions.
www.healthsystem.com/telehealth-link*

Appointment Reminder

One hour before a virtual visit (excluding same-day appointments), remind patients of their upcoming appointment. Also include Consent to Treat form in the automated appointment reminder cadence.

Example:

As a reminder, your appointment is at 2:00 p.m. today. This will be a video visit. Please make sure you have downloaded our telehealth app at www.healthsystem.com/telehealthlink

Session Launch

Fifteen minutes before a virtual visit, send a message reminding the patient to launch their session.

Example:

"Your virtual visit will begin in approximately fifteen minutes. Please be prepared and find a quiet space. Have your video and audio on and launch the visit a few minutes prior to 2:00 pm. LINK: {telemed link}"

Technical Help

WELL's bidirectional texting capability supports your staff in providing assistance for telehealth technical challenges.

Example:

Use the Keyword Action #HELP to re-route patients to the telehealth help desk team when they have an issue with telehealth.



3

Update appointment confirmations and reminders to reflect current safety protocols

WELL clients use these messages to provide instructions related to COVID, such as what patients should do if they're experiencing symptoms, how to utilize the virtual waiting room, and new safety protocols.

Example:

Hello, {clientFirstNameProperCase}. We look forward to seeing you! If you have concerns regarding the coronavirus or suspect you may have been exposed, please text back or call us prior to your visit. Special precautions will be taken when you arrive to protect you, our staff, and other patients. Text us back if you have questions.

Virtual Care Example:

Hello, {clientFirstNameProperCase}. We look forward to seeing you! If you think you're symptomatic and have an elevated temperature, cough, sneezing, or other flu-like symptoms, consider our virtual urgent care. [Click here for more information \[link\]](#)

Reschedule Example:

Hello, {clientFirstNameProperCase}. We look forward to seeing you! If you have an elevated temperature, cough, sneezing, or other flu-like symptoms, we encourage you to reschedule your appointment until you have been fever-free for at least 24 hours. Text us back if you have questions.

4

Write Quick Responses to COVID-19 questions

Within the WELL platform, Quick Responses are pre-written messages that can be used to manually respond to common inbound patient messages, such as “What should I bring to my appointment?” They save staff time, particularly during times of high volume.

Use Quick Responses to respond to frequently asked questions regarding the coronavirus. Consider creating responses to the following common questions and others and directing patients to a static landing page that answers other common questions:

- I was exposed to COVID, should I get tested?
- What security measures do you have in place?
- Can I bring a guest to my appointment?

Example:

At Health System, we are working to protect your health. We have implemented new processes to ensure your health and safety when visiting our offices: No visitors/ companions are allowed without special approval; everyone is required to wear a mask and temperature screenings are in place at all entrances. If you have a fever, cough or other respiratory symptoms, please contact our office prior to your in-person appointment. Where appropriate, we offer telephone or video visits.

5

Automatically respond to keywords in patient texts

In WELL, Keyword Automations enable automated responses to common inquiries and they are a valuable tool in answering inbound messages on the coronavirus. Consider automating responses to inbound keywords such as:

COVID-19
Coronavirus
Vaccine
Test
Fever

Cough
Breathing
Hard to breathe
Cold
Flu

Example:

We offer drive-up COVID-19 testing at our Main Street location Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. without an appointment. For more information, tap [link].



6

Reach large groups of patients with Campaigns

WELL Campaigns are the simplest way to reach your full patient population. During the pandemic, health systems are using WELL Campaigns to:

- Notify patients of location re-openings
- Inform patients about the availability of COVID-19 testing
- Encourage patients to get a flu shot and send a link to recommended locations
- Provide updates on practices or policies around COVID-19, such as cleaning regimens and safety guidelines
- Allay patient fears and provide reassurance that they take the virus seriously and are diligently working to ensure the health and safety of their patient populations
- Reach high-risk patients (e.g. those over age 60 or who have underlying conditions) to inform them of the resources available if they are experiencing coronavirus symptoms
- Reach chronic care patients with resources for monitoring their condition

Additionally, some health systems send out a Campaign Message to all patients with a link to their COVID-19 web page and information on virtual visits.

Example:

Our Main Street location is now open and accepting patients. Tap here [link] or reply to this message to schedule a visit. We continue to comply with local health mandates and ask all patients to wear a mask and refrain from bringing guests to their visit.



- Cantonese
- Catalan
- Danish
- Dutch
- English
- Finnish
- French
- German
- Italian
- Japanese
- Korean
- Mandarin
- Norwegian
- Polish
- Portuguese
- Russian
- Spanish
- Swedish
- Taiwanese
- Mandarin

7 Send updates to large groups of patients with upcoming appointments

Broadcast messages sent through WELL can reach up to 1,000 patients with upcoming appointments at once. WELL clients use Broadcast messages to inform patients of last-minute changes, such as a provider calling in sick or a change in location.

Example:

Hello, {clientFirstNameProperCase}. Our {location_name} is temporarily closed. We have rescheduled your upcoming appointment for our {location_name} at {location_address}. We look forward to seeing you!

8 Send messages in a language your patients understand

When rewriting Automations, generating Quick Responses, writing Broadcasts and Campaigns, and setting up Keyword Automations, don't forget your patients who speak a language other than English. Each of these responses can be generated in any of WELL's 19 different language offerings. As usual, verify responses with a native speaker.



9

Deliver patient education by text message

Text messaging provides a scalable method for distributing patient education around COVID-19 both in automated responses and campaigns to specific groups or your full patient population.

For example, when patients text in with questions related to COVID-19 using certain keywords, auto-respond with links to educational materials.

Also, send patient education around COVID-19 to targeted patient populations, such as those with existing conditions, patients who are more than 60 years of age, or patients with suspected or confirmed cases in self-quarantine.

“Now more than ever it is critical for patients to have the most current and evidence-based information on COVID-19,” said Denise Basow, MD, CEO of Clinical Effectiveness, Wolters Kluwer, Health. “Patients and health systems will benefit from our content during this challenging time thanks to the WELL platform.”

10

Set up a COVID-19 landing page

Create a dedicated landing page to answer frequently asked questions about the coronavirus. Provide the latest measures your organization is taking to mitigate continue caring for patients during the pandemic...

Here are a couple excellent examples:

Houston Methodist: <https://www.houstonmethodist.org/coronavirus/>

Cedars-Sinai: <https://www.cedars-sinai.org/newsroom/coronavirus-what-you-need-to-know/>

If your health system does not have a landing page created, direct patients to the Centers for Disease Control's website on COVID-19:

English: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Spanish: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index-sp.html>



Sample Automations

WELL allows you to customize messaging at a moment's notice.

Patient communication with WELL is completely self-configurable. That means health systems can make changes to automations in an instant without needing to file a support ticket and wait days or weeks for a change to go live. This enables them to deliver the most relevant information possible to their patients.

Example:

Hello, {clientFirstNameProperCase}. We look forward to seeing you! If you have concerns regarding the coronavirus or suspect you may have been exposed, please text back or call us prior to your visit. Special precautions will be taken when you arrive to protect you, our staff, and other patients. Text us back if you have questions.

Ejemplo en español:

Hola, {clientFirstNameProperCase}. ¡Esperamos verte! Si tiene inquietudes con respecto al coronavirus o sospecha que puede haber estado expuesto, envíe un mensaje de texto o llámenos antes de su visita. Se tomarán precauciones especiales cuando llegue para protegerlo a usted, a nuestro personal y a otros pacientes. Envíenos un mensaje de texto si tiene preguntas.

Virtual Care Example:

Hello, {clientFirstNameProperCase}. We look forward to seeing you! If you think you're symptomatic and have an elevated temperature, cough, sneezing, or other flu-like symptoms, consider our virtual urgent care. Click here for more information [link]

Cuidado virtual ejemplo en español:

Hola, {clientFirstNameProperCase}. ¡Esperamos verte! Si cree que es sintomático y tiene una temperatura elevada, tos, estornudos o otros síntomas similares a la gripe, considere nuestra atención virtual de urgencia. Haga click aquí para obtener más información [link]

Reschedule Example:

Hello, {clientFirstNameProperCase}. We look forward to seeing you! If you have an elevated temperature, cough, sneezing, or other flu-like symptoms, we encourage you to reschedule your appointment until you have been fever-free for at least 24 hours. Text us back if you have questions.

Reprogramar ejemplo en español:

Hola, {clientFirstNameProperCase}. ¡Esperamos verte! Si tiene una temperatura elevada, tos, estornudos o otros síntomas similares a los de la gripe, le recomendamos que posponga su cita hasta que no haya tenido fiebre durante al menos 24 horas. Envíenos un mensaje de texto si tiene preguntas.

Quick Response

Keywords

COVID-19
coronavirus
vaccine
test
fever
cough
breathing
hard to breathe
cold
flu

Keywords en español:

COVID-19
coronavirus
vacuna
prueba
fiebre
tos
respiración
difícil respirar
resfrío
gripe

Example:

Hello, {clientFirstNameProperCase}. COVID-19 is an upper respiratory illness that causes the following symptoms: fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Symptoms may appear in two days or as many as 14 days after exposure. Other illnesses may cause similar symptoms. For more information, visit our website [\[link\]](#)

Ejemplo en español:

Hola, {clientFirstNameProperCase}. COVID-19 es una enfermedad de las vías respiratorias superiores que causa los siguientes síntomas: fiebre, tos y falta de aire. Los síntomas pueden aparecer en dos días o hasta 14 días después de la exposición. Otras enfermedades pueden causar síntomas similares. Para obtener más información, visite nuestro sitio web [\[link\]](#)

Example:

Coronavirus Update: We are here to support you! If you believe you have been exposed to the coronavirus or believe you have symptoms, our clinicians are available through virtual urgent care. For more information, visit [\[link\]](#)

Ejemplo en español:

Información de Coronavirus: ¡Estamos aquí para apoyarlo! Si cree que ha estado expuesto al coronavirus o cree que tiene síntomas, nuestros médicos están disponibles a través de atención virtual de urgencia. Para obtener más información, visite [\[link\]](#)

Broadcasts

Example:

Hello, {clientFirstNameProperCase}. To prevent further spread of the coronavirus, {practiceName} is temporarily closed. Please call us at xxx-xxx-xxxx or schedule a virtual urgent care visit here [\[link\]](#)

Ejemplo en español:

Hola, {clientFirstNameProperCase}. Para evitar una mayor propagación del coronavirus, {practiceName} estará temporalmente cerrada. Llámenos al xxx-xxx-xxxx o regístrese a una visita virtual de atención de urgencia aquí [\[link\]](#)

Example:

If you have concerns regarding the coronavirus or suspect you may have been exposed, please text back or call us at xxx-xxx-xxxx. Avoid coming into the clinic. Instead, schedule a virtual visit here [{shortlink}](#)

Ejemplo en español:

Si tiene dudas sobre el coronavirus o sospecha que puede haber estado expuesto, envíe un mensaje de texto o llámenos al xxx-xxx-xxxx. Evite entrar a la clínica. En vez, regístrese una visita virtual aquí [{shortlink}](#)

Use this playbook for reaching your patients during the pandemic

Information regarding COVID-19, vaccine trials, community spread, and containment strategies changes moment by moment. Therefore, it's essential that patient communication be updated in real time.