

THE PATIENT EXPERIENCE REVOLUTION:

How Modern Contact Centers Are
Transforming The Healthcare Industry





Patient experience has become a critical focus point of healthcare providers globally. Healthcare providers now view a patient's health and wellbeing as a strategic business imperative. The pandemic has shifted patient expectations, and it's become abundantly clear that successful customer experience impacts an organization's reputation, finances, and future.

The healthcare industry should understand, respond to, and improve the patient's experience and move towards a patient-centered and future-proof model.



Understanding The Patient Experience



The Beryl Institute is an organization of healthcare professionals passionate about transforming the healthcare experience by offering unbiased research and proven medical practices. In 2021 they issued a report entitled Consumer Perspectives on Patient Experience 2021, stating that



The population, in general, is getting more sophisticated in their healthcare engagement and are no longer engaging as passive passengers on a care journey.

The patient experience is the internal and subjective response that patients have to any direct or indirect contact with a company, at every touchpoint, across their entire patient journey. This journey encompasses the patient's interactions with a physician, health plan, hospital staff, private clinics, and websites related to healthcare-related facilities. The experiences of easy access to information, good communication, and timely appointments form an integral part of healthcare quality and delivery valued by patients when they seek and receive care.

Nowadays, patients judge the entire healthcare system based on a single event on their journey and then rate their overall experience. Organizations need to get every touchpoint right and unified to deliver a good patient experience.

67%

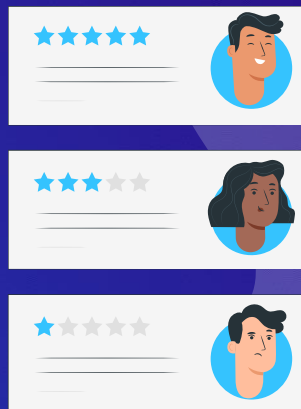
of patients have said that a single poor customer service experience with a provider will negatively impact their brand loyalty.

experience



satisfaction

The terms patient **experience and satisfaction** are frequently interchanged — but they are different, although both are tied to patient expectations.





Satisfaction is achieved when a health organization meets a patient's expectations. Two patients may receive the same care and experience but have different expectations about how health organizations deliver health care. These different expectations impact their satisfaction levels. While patient satisfaction surveys have existed for years, they rarely provide insight into achieving or improving patients' satisfaction. Patient satisfaction is defined as the culmination of a series of patient experiences, both good and bad. Patient satisfaction is achieved when the gap between patient expectations and subsequent experiences closes.

The pandemic has thoroughly changed the world's understanding of what patients need and expect from healthcare providers, and these companies are facing a new reality. Patients are determined to experience healthcare on their terms, and their expectations will shape providers' behaviors and decisions for the foreseeable future.

Shifting Customer Expectations

The Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS) held a Patient Engagement and Experience Summit in 2018. This summit aimed to share best health practices for patients to create a competitive advantage. Jan Oldenburg, who has written several books on transforming healthcare services, delivered a closing keynote address. She said:



" Look at the ways people have gotten creative with online banking and shopping — anticipating the needs we might have, offering suggestions based on analytics about what we've done in the past and our patterns of behavior. We could be doing that for health."

In 2021, the [IPSOS Global Health Service Monitor](#) measured the public's perception of 30 countries' healthcare services, asking what the future healthcare system might look like. Despite the many challenges faced in the last two years, public perceptions of healthcare have improved, and the majority (53%) rate their public healthcare system positively. On the other hand:

56%

of the respondents believe that the healthcare system is overstretched

41%

saying waiting times are the biggest challenge

39%

saying lack of stuff is the biggest challenge



Interestingly, developed countries like Great Britain and France believe that healthcare will not improve in the future, with 85% of British participants saying that their system is overstretched (compared to the global average of 56%). Overall, 34% of people globally believe that the system will continue to improve in their country. In general, people have high expectations of their healthcare systems.

The pandemic has transformed healthcare procedures, how providers approach patient care, and how they measure their experiences. Patients aren't comparing apples with apples anymore.

They've experienced overnight delivery, Zoom board meetings, teleconsultations, online bookings, and the Internet of Things. Banks have transformed their services, with branchless banks and online services replacing a system of tellers and physical outlets that have been part of banks for hundreds of years. If these omnichannel capabilities exist, it stands to reason that digital health tools can be deployed to healthcare and medical facilities.

Patients requiring medical assistance are highly anxious, and if they don't receive immediate care, their anxiety heightens. Today, patients demand autonomy and are highly educated about health care.

Consider the fact that nearly 650 million healthcare monitoring devices such as smartwatches and mobile applications were used by healthcare workers and consumers in 2020, from smartwatches to mobile apps.



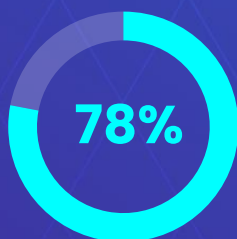


Patients are more aware of health and are making their concerns known, demanding convenience, attention, and better service from their healthcare providers, especially those who lag behind innovation and customer service.

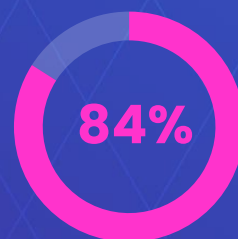
While you can order a meal, make a payment to a supplier, and attend a college class at three in the morning if you choose to do so, your local general practitioner (GP) likely sticks to the very inconvenient 9 am to 5 pm schedule he's always had.

The model hasn't changed to meet the public's demand, who are now conditioned to a world that meets their needs on-demand.

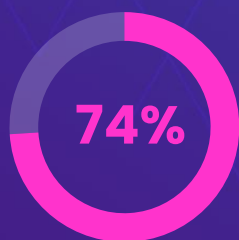
According to the Accenture Digital Health Consumer Survey 2019, patients have clear-cut needs and expectations of their healthcare providers:



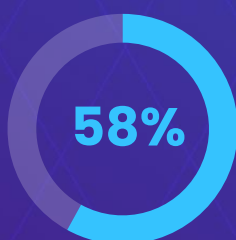
of patients want fast, accurate support on their preferred channels.



of patients expect customer services to be solved quickly and accurately.



say their preferred channel varies according to the context in which it's being used, signaling the need for an omnichannel approach.



of patients say their customer service expectations are higher than before.



expect digital capabilities from their service providers and choose providers based on those capabilities.

Healthcare providers that recognize these trends and cater to them will soon realize that they've unlocked the key to driving their competitive advantage in the marketplace. Once patients start flocking to the providers that cater to their needs, others will have no choice but to follow suit.

An Ambitious Industry, But Slow To React



The President and CEO of Thomas Jefferson University, Stephen Klasko, is a leader in predicting the future of the healthcare industry. He says:



"If you are a provider and think you're going to go back to your business model solely being based on hospital revenue and not relevant to people who won't care at home, I think you will be out of business . . . If hospitals believe that innovation can just be this cute little thing they do in the background, but the real business is just getting heads in beds, they're nuts. I think we were always wondering what the big disruption would be that got us to join the consumer revolution, and I think this is it."

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated innovation in the healthcare sector. Healthcare providers scrambled to roll out consumerist technologies in the space of a few weeks. These included remote patient monitoring, teleconsultations, and online bookings. Traditional services become untenable.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services record that

15%

increase virtual doctor's offices experienced in less than a year peaking in June–July 2020, where 85% of all visits were virtual

52%

of clinical leaders reported significant shifts in technological adoption and virtual health strategies

24%

of clinical leaders reported moderate modifications

60%

felt that their health systems needed additional investment in virtual health systems

52%

said an enterprisewide strategy was required

54%

planning to develop such a strategy within the next three years.

Healthcare practitioners are thinking differently about patient experiences by looking at their patients through the lens of consumerism. Patients are viewed as customers and practices and hospitals as storefronts.



They are willing to adopt the trends that have fuelled the most successful consumer brands in the world, including personalization, access to goods and services through user-friendly applications, and rethinking practices like long waiting times in uncomfortable lobbies or in-person visits to reissue prescriptions. However, the industry faces numerous barriers to transformation – both technological and cultural.

For many years, information technology (IT) within hospitals has limited scope, budget, and experience. Financial decisions can take years to include, and investments need to guarantee a minimum rate of return. Contact Centers, the first customer-facing port of call for any hospital or physician's office, remain reactive and limited. Few health IT professionals have the resources to manage the demands of a customer-centric system on their own, particularly IT support and cybersecurity. Here are some expert opinions:



Consumerism is very, very late to health care. I think health care has not been as competitive, by any stretch, in the United States, as other industry sectors. And I think that's why it's been so un-consumer-centric and un-consumer-friendly.

Chief of Global Consumer Insight at Disney,
KEVIN MABBUTT



As someone who has worked for decades to enhance the patient experience, it is my estimation that the US health care system lags years, perhaps decades, behind other industries in terms of understanding and delivering a consumer-oriented experience. I've had this belief reinforced by consumer experts from the retail, dig-tech, and entertainment industries.

Reframing Healthcare,
DR. ZEEV E. NEUWIRTH, MD



We certainly respect consumers more than anybody in the healthcare industry does. Healthcare has to be about the consumer only. Physicians and hospitals exist to serve people

Vice President of health transformation at Walmart, **MARCUS OSBORNE**



To look at Silicon Valley and then to look at the healthcare sector, you may come away thinking that the professionals in each believe themselves to be in entirely different centuries.

Patient Experience Reimagined,
ED MARX

Healthcare organizations should want to meet ever-adapting consumer expectations. They will have to adapt their practices and challenge their assumptions to achieve this. They will have to look at what healthcare is about and what their patients need, looking at other sectors (like retail and banking) as guiding examples.

Transforming the traditional healthcare model will require meeting the minds between medical professionals who understand patient care and experiences and IT consultants who can execute their strategies with technology.

Understanding the Role Played By Technology



Healthcare organizations implemented patient portals during the pandemic to reduce patient visits and waiting times, coordinate information, and provide online engagement and information options.

While this signifies progress, many providers lacked the digital prowess to deliver against customer expectations. These portals increase efficiencies and lower costs, but some patients find them confusing. Healthcare organizations' IT stacks are often siloed and disconnected, increasing patient dissatisfaction.

Few organizations are omnichannel, and several healthcare organizations have multiple contact centers supporting different departments and groups. A single family may have several online portal accounts and find themselves filling in the same information repeatedly for each member.

The result is a fragmented obstacle course that patients have to navigate to receive the requisite care.

ACCORDING TO STUDIES:

74%

of patients report providing the same information to multiple healthcare professionals

60%

report repeatedly taking the same tests

63%

of clinical leaders reported moderate modifications

These factors impact the patient experience and have a poorer outcome for the patient, who is faced with conflicting messages and unclear paths for fulfilling and pursuing care recommendations.

Jan Oldenberg says about the approach, that would improve patient access to healthcare and enable better care coordination:



"We've known for an awful long time that patients are deeply frustrated with 'multi-portalitis'. If we were writing meaningful use regulations today, we would pay much more attention to common data and help people access a longitudinal record, rather than focusing on each provider doing an independent record of patient care. Within communities, physicians, vendors, hospitals need to figure out how to join together their data, even if it means they have to give up a little bit of autonomy. They have to figure out how to build common data sources so patients can go to whichever portal they're most comfortable with and see all their data."



Studies by the University of Colorado have shown that patient handoffs are among the most dangerous moments in the treatment process, impacting retention, reputation, and revenue. Technology can provide the engagement layer needed to seamlessly orchestrate digital and in-person interactions across channels – mainly through PX-driven, modern contact centers.

The Benefits Of Adopting A Contact Center As A Service Model

In many organizations, including the healthcare industry, the contact center is a customer's first person-to-person interaction. But contact centers are no longer mere call centers putting calls through and answering emails in a timeous manner. They play a significant role as patient engagement and experience centers.

Instead of reactively responding to patient queries, these contact centers can become proactive and predictive data sources for customer relationship management, billing, and electronic health records. Contact center software can integrate with health information exchanges, which can pull data into electronic health records (EHR) so that patients and physicians have complete and comprehensive access to patients' medical records.

When combined with AI, contact center agents can send wellness tips, patient reminders, and checks to improve patient outcomes. Smart AI-driven systems can analyze vast amounts of data to suggest the best subsequent actions for patients instead of pushing them through a generic process flow.



A customized interactive voice response (IVR) system can offer patients self-serve options to check their balance, settle accounts, and get advice quickly. Automated notification services can send mass voice messages, bill reminders, and emergency texts.

Queue callback features would mean patients no longer have to wait in a telephonic queue, improving patient communication and demonstrating that the company values their time.



Accessing Cost Savings Through Cloud Services

James Lawson, Chief Solutions Officer at Verge Health, says:



"Several years ago, it was 'you're crazy if you think we'll put patient data in the cloud.' Today, it's 'you're crazy if you think you're going to put patient data in my servers'. When you're the last man standing with a data center, and your competitors are using that capital to generate revenue, the upside of moving to the cloud will become crystal clear."

The technology for a thoroughly modern contact center is available, but legacy contact centers have hampered progress. Despite the pandemic, hybrid cloud deployment only increased 18% in 2020, and cloud adoption has been slow. Many hospitals rely on outdated, on-premises data centers, which take up space and risk physical disasters.

ON-PREMISE SERVERS HAVE DISADVANTAGES, INCLUDING:



They are hard to integrate with other systems.



They require frequent and time-consuming updates from already-strained IT departments.



They need onsite work and onsite agents.



They carry high maintenance costs.



They create a silo mentality where there is a reluctance to share information.



Cloud solutions enable agents to work from anywhere. The systems can be integrated quickly and updated automatically. They connect all core systems to a single, unified platform and carry minimal maintenance costs.



Healthcare organizations can **dramatically reduce IT, integration, and support costs** by switching to a cloud-based contact center as a service model. This cloud-based contact center is a software deployment model whereby a vendor operates the contact center technology.

There are several other benefits to cloud solutions. **Remote access and communication** enable greater patient safety and care, reduce traffic within hospitals and clinics, and benefit infection control. **Data sharing** between experts within and outside the hospital is improved, as is transparency between departments, physicians, and patients.

Radiology departments can **share imaging in the cloud, reducing costs** (and the need to travel to the hospital to read a scan physically). Information Technology and patient charges are reduced, and the savings are allocated where it's most needed or passed on to the patients themselves, resulting in a more competitive hospital.

Conversational AI can enable a healthcare-trained voice and digital chatbots to **handle your contact center** and relieve the burden on administrative staff. This software creates an intelligent patient self-service and call-routing channel, including performing non-emergency triage. This system saves time and money while providing a better experience for the patient. That way, you can support your customers more efficiently, at no extra cost.

If healthcare providers are willing to move their contact centers to the cloud, they gain additive support for improved patient experiences.



Facilitating Communication And Patient Care

A modern cloud-based contact center still serves traditional customer needs and can fully support and transform the patient experience. The contact center facilitates in- and outbound interactions to suit patient needs and can serve as the platform that coordinates truly effective healthcare workflows within the practice or center.

Suppose an AI and machine-learning layer is added to the contact center using contact center software. In that case, the data it processes can become predictive-learning from past interactions and triggering interactions and automated contact relevant to the patient's needs.

For patients requiring chronic medical attention or longer-term care, the AI can become a trusted coordinator that keeps track of diagnoses and prescriptions and makes recommendations via the channel of their choice.

Healthcare industries should use a contact center as a service. The contact center can enable a holistic, unified communications strategy between physicians and patients, providing a better patient experience. It can also continually collect feedback and data to improve over time.



Bringing Business Intelligence To The Healthcare Industry

At the [Deloitte: Roundtable Discussion](#), a physician said



"We are looking at ways to leverage data and develop algorithms to help predict the right length of visits, the type of visit, and whether it can be a video, phone, or face-to-face [visit] so that this process becomes more automated rather than leaving it up to the provider."



A cloud-based contact center holds crucial data like medical, financial, and insurance records and insight into patient needs and preferences, their past and preferred interactions. Interaction analytics, feedback results, and even data from wearables can inform a host of business and patient decisions and result in workflow automation.

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) is a compilation of regulatory standards that outline the lawful use and disclosure of protected health information (PHI). Powerful, HIPAA-compliant data analytics and AI capabilities are the keys to personalized patient experiences.

These tools benefit the patient and their entire community, the healthcare provider's reputation, and the prospects of an increased customer base. **Artificial intelligence** creates an aggregated, anonymous integration and repository of information that can spot dangerous outbreaks or patient trends and needs over time.

Speech recognition and sentiment analysis improve customer service and trains representatives. Engagement data impacts machine learning to create tailored messages, make recommendations or even automate actions that facilitate the best possible care.

Meeting Patient Needs

The technological use and integration of contact centers, AI, and EHR improve the patient experience. Interactions are synchronized, consistent, and properly contextualized to reduce patient frustration and build trust.

Patients no longer need to recap their medical history or complete the same medical history and insurance forms every time they visit the facility. Physicians know their patients through detailed analyses and single-source-of-truth recordkeeping, which not only promotes trust but steers the patient towards better outcomes.

Patients can enjoy the same experience they've come to expect from other service-based businesses, communicating with providers 24/7 via the channel of their choice.





In Closing

Patient experiences were changed dramatically and perhaps irrevocably by COVID-19, but the transformation has not gone far enough. Patients expect a digital experience that provides care and guidance with transparency and insight.

Much like the discovery process of any consumer-facing technology product, healthcare organizations and their employees should seek to gain a holistic understanding of their patient's needs, unmet needs, preferences, and challenges.

The right technology can address the needs, enhance the experience, and help the organization move from a narrow focus on the patient's disease state to a broader focus on the population's health by collating and sharing anonymized data for the benefit of the community. Organizations should integrate new platforms and processes to collect data within existing workflows, leverage advanced technologies for actionable insights, and enable data-driven decision-making.

HealthA's modern cloud contact center has the potential to support a unified, improved patient experience through increased engagement improved data and service delivery.

How to transform your business

Healthcare companies' technological advances lagged perhaps because they believed that their own, thinly-stretched IT departments should be solely responsible for implementing these technologies or that a plug-and-play solution was the best way forward. While adding digital capabilities to healthcare services is essential, it's not the end goal. Technology is not the panacea of a good patient experience.

True digital transformation can vary dramatically from organization to organization and should be approached like a roadmap or journey. A facilitator asks the business to look inward, identify opportunities for improvement, and help them implement the best technological solution in the best possible manner. People, processes, and technology have to come together.

Healthcare organizations will benefit from choosing the right strategic partner to identify and map their current capabilities and technology, consult and assist them in driving cultural change, and providing the technological support needed to implement and adopt the right solution for the organization.

Over the years, Disruptive Innovations has helped numerous healthcare organizations transform – both technologically and culturally – placing the patient experience at the heart of everything they do.

About the Writer



DAVID WRIGHT

Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Disruptive Innovations, an award-winning digital business and technology firm based in New York City.

Disruptive Innovations augments service and support for enterprise organizations – specializing in IT Strategy and the execution of various digital transformation initiatives. David leads the overall consultative effort with all clients, and has scaled an extensive team of AE's, engineers, project managers and other key resources to support. Disruptive Innovations is committed to aligning technology solutions to solve business challenges and ensuring that all strategies embody the client's vision for the future.

As a collaborative and transparent leader, David ensures that clients are always fully involved in every aspect of their partnership. David works with clients in every vertical, including healthcare, technology, financial services. David has spoken on many panels discussing digital transformation and holds a dual Bachelor's degree in Economics and Sociology from Fordham University. In his free time, David enjoys supporting non-profit organizations, doing yoga, and spending time with his wife and daughter.



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