How to Solve Gaps in Care & Recover Patient Volume

Health systems and medical providers have long spent an incredible amount of time and resources addressing the barriers to patient access that cause patients to fall behind in follow-up and preventive care.

Enter COVID-19—gaps in care have skyrocketed over the past 18 months, the CDC recently reported that 41% of adults delayed or avoided care last year, one-third of that included routine care. Gaps in care have far-reaching consequences for patients and health care as a whole. Prolonging or putting off care of an acute illness or injury can allow conditions to worsen, resulting in higher acuity, more complications, and requiring more resources to treat. What could have been treated in an outpatient setting like a physician’s office or urgent care may require care in the Emergency Room or an inpatient stay if allowed to worsen. For patients with chronic conditions like heart disease, diabetes, high cholesterol, and autoimmune diseases—though symptoms are generally manageable with good adherence to their care plans, these patients can decline quickly when they fall out of compliance.
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It’s widely accepted that early detection is key to higher survival rates and better outcomes for patients with cancer, but when patients put off routine screenings and exams they are at higher risk for missing the early signs of cancer and allowing it to spread to other organs and systems. For aggressive cancers, this can be the difference between life and death.

Tackle Gaps in Care with Automation

Healthcare providers don’t typically have the luxury of extra resources, pulling staff to reach out to patients manually means sacrificing in another area of the medical practice as both clinical and administrative staff are frequently carrying the workload of more than one FTE. Further, there’s no reason that health systems and medical providers should have to conduct manual patient outreach as digital solutions can now do this more efficiently, keep communication more organized, and document patient outreach automatically.

Three Digital Communication Tools to Bridge Gaps in Care Quickly

Automated Health Campaigns

Utilizing automated health campaigns is the single best strategy for reaching your patient populations quickly and solving gaps in care. Most importantly, health campaigns offer a more intelligent solution than alternative strategies as they are triggered by clinical data in the EHR, can utilize multiple channels to distribute education and clear calls to action, and can be setup to automatically remove a patient from the campaign if the patient schedules an appointment.* Health campaigns are the most efficient way to deliver targeted, relevant information to segmented groups of patients. Once patients are segmented into meaningful clinical groups, you can determine a schedule and cadence for communication and let it run.

A few best practices will help optimize your health campaign strategy, delivering the highest ROI and best patient outcomes. Think about your organization’s ability to handle the influx of patients and “throttle” your messaging accordingly so you can manage provider availability. If you offer self-scheduling on your website or through your portal, be sure to include a link to scheduling and a clear call to action so patients are not only reminded that they are due for care but are far more likely to respond and take the appropriate action. Finally, be sure to leverage more than one communication channel. Email works most effectively for longer-form educational materials while text messaging if a great strategy for concise messaging that prompts patients to schedule.
**Automated Recalls**

While health campaigns are triggered by clinical data, automated recalls are set months in advance and are triggered by scheduling data. This more simplistic strategy is based on the recurring care a patient is due for and triggers the patient automatically when it's time for them to schedule their appointment. While recalls lack the educational component of a health campaign, they are an effective strategy for “catching” patients before they fall through the cracks and behind in their care.

**Broadcast Messaging**

While health campaigns and recalls offer unique messaging tailored specifically to patient needs, broadcast messaging is an incredibly effective strategy for pushing information to groups of patients, big or small, all at once. This one-way message can be used to inform patients when a new provider is available, new services, testing, or procedures are offered, or to push patients to a self-scheduling site—all of which can help prompt patients to schedule an appointment and reduce gaps in care. While the messaging on a broadcast communication should be generic in nature, you can still segment your patients into lists based on when they were last seen or whether or not they have an appointment scheduled during a future time period.

**Leverage All Three for Best Results**

Leveraged together, these three strategies are a powerful combination for re engaging patients and helping move them forward in their care. And now is the time, while patients are at higher risk for adverse outcomes and undiagnosed conditions, physicians are seeing a drop in patient volume. A strategy anchored by health campaigns and complemented with recalls and broadcast messaging addresses both patient risk and lower patient volumes, adding appointments back to the schedule, helping health systems and medical providers recover lost revenue, and driving healthier patient populations.

*Not all solutions are created equal, be sure to vet this functionality with any vendor you consider working with.*

Are you ready to get started? Let’s connect.

Contact us at Relatient.net or call us at (866) 473-8160