In Your Patients' Shoes:

Take the Empathy Experience Challenge

WHITE PAPER

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Healthcare organizations invest time and money on sales and marketing in a continual search for new patients. Yet, research suggests that savvy consumers tend to ignore much of that information. Personal referrals are the top information source people say they value when looking for a new provider. In fact, **70 percent of patients say they value patient experience**[1] **over traditional marketing**.

This is a powerful motivation for making the patient experience easy, personalized and intuitive. A growing number of healthcare organizations are waking up to this reality. A recent survey by Deloitte[2] finds that **37 percent of healthcare CFOs view patient engagement and trust as a top business concern today**.

But patient engagement is not a one-time event; it **is a collective journey** that spans the first time patients interact with your brand, possibly via advertising or price shopping, up until they pay for their service. No matter how your organization is structured internally, **patients experience it as one brand, not a collection of processes**.

Take the challenge to walk in your patients shoes through the entire patient journey to ensure the road your patients traverse is clear, consistent and appropriate. It should not be full of metaphorical pot holes, dead ends and obstacles. **Walking in their shoes will show you how to make their journey smooth, connected, personal and easy to navigate.** Not only will your patients notice and appreciate it, they will be inclined to tell their family and friends.

So, how, exactly, do you begin?

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Getting Started

Begin by thinking through everything a patient must do to interact with your organization, including:

- ☐ **Finding the right provider** (i.e., navigating an initial search for a provider, often online)
- ☐ **Understanding financial obligations** prior to service
- ☐ **Finding an appointment time** that fits their schedule
- ☐ **Preparing for appointments**, including completing paperwork and paying copays
- ☐ **Arriving and checking in**, in a way that feels comfortable, safe and efficient
- ☐ **Receiving care**
- ☐ **Fulfilling financial obligations**
- ☐ **Asking questions** and providing feedback

Your goal is to understand how each of these processes unfold and how they are connected or, as is often the case, disconnected. It's relatively easy to see if your billing statement is clear and easy to understand, but are you inspecting the consistency of that statement relative to the estimate or call center experience? **Only by considering your system in its entirety—from a patient's perspective—can you know if there is consistency from beginning to end, and if your organization is responding appropriately and empathetically at every juncture.**

Once you understand the entire patient journey you will be **empowered to provide the best path for each patient**, which will drive improved healthcare revenue collections for your organization and optimal outcomes for your patients. But beware: what works for one patient may be completely wrong for another. **Building flexibility** into your system—along with tools for showing you what's working and what isn't for individual patients over time—is **a proven strategy** for ensuring each patient's journey fits them best.

By understanding what patients experience you will **gain invaluable empathy and insight** into how you can make the experience precisely right for each patient.

What's the ROI for Patient Experience?

A University of Westminster study[3] found employees who take active steps to put themselves in patients' shoes have a significantly better understanding of patients' health challenges. Another study[4] concluded that **empathy exceeded pain control** as a barometer of patient satisfaction. If empathy can have such a profound effect on satisfaction and health outcomes, then the same can certainly be true for a patient's non-clinical care and financial journey. The bottom line: **By understanding what patients experience you will gain invaluable empathy and insight into how you can make the experience precisely right for each patient. If better outcomes, loyalty and waste elimination are among your goals, a better patient experience will pay dividends.**

Your Guide to a Smooth Connected Patient Experience

Finding a provider

Questions to Explore:

- How easy or difficult is it to find your healthcare organization online?
- Do you provide examples of how you have served patients in the past?
- Are specialty services clearly delineated?

Making Connections:

New and existing patients should be able to quickly and easily reach scheduling staff or a self-serve scheduling option on your website. Consider adding scheduling phone numbers to statements too.

Looking for service options

Questions to Explore:

- Are you in compliance with the Price Transparency and No Surprises Act?
- Do you make it easy for potential patients to see at least 300 shoppable healthcare services and what you charge for each?
- Have you tried to find prices yourself on your site? Was it an easy or frustrating process?

Making Connections:

Provide easy to find and understand pricing information.

Give patients actionable options after they shop—including scheduling an appointment—and make sure team members know how to answer questions about pricing.

Understanding financial obligations

Questions to Explore:

- What does a potential patient need to do to obtain an estimate from your organization?
- Is there a clear and easy process outlined on your website?
- Do you provide a form for downloading? A phone number for questions? Can patients find those things easily?
- Do patients understand how to apply for financial assistance or to be put on a payment plan? Does your staff?

Making Connections:

Data on estimates should be tracked with the end balance to continually improve estimate accuracy.

Give registrar team members and even CSRs visibility to estimates.

Empower staff to interpret estimates with confidence and explain discrepancies between estimates and actual charges.

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Remembering appointments

Questions to Explore:

- Do you make it easy for busy people to remember their appointments?
- Is it possible for you to remind patients of appointments using the method they most prefer (phone message, email or text)?
- Is it easy for patients to reschedule if they cannot keep their appointment?

Making Connections:

Use reminders to alert patients of past due amounts and let them know they can pay them now or when they check in, along with any required copays.

Provide tools to make confirming and rescheduling easy.

Preparing for appointments

Questions to Explore:

- What is your process for asking patients to complete pre-appointment paperwork?
- Do you provide an option to complete paperwork in advance, including a digital option?
- Do different departments in your health system request duplicative information?
- Do patients know, before they arrive, how much their service will cost and/or what their copayment will be? Do they have options to pay in the way that's best for them?

Making Connections:

Consider providing one central hub for patients to prepare for care. Use data you have on file to pre-fill information and reduce the burden on patients.

Take the time to obtain consent to make sure you and every department within your entire system are reaching patients in the ways they prefer—every step of the way.

Checking in

Questions to Explore:

- Do patients feel comfortable and safe when checking in?
- Is it possible for patients to check in from your parking lot using their own mobile device?
- Is there an option to take care of co-pays as part of a digital check in?
- For in-person check ins, do you clearly post the availability of financial aid as required by law?

Making Connections:

Increase safety with touchless technology to check in anywhere—from their living room to the parking lot.

Provide options to pay their co-pays and any prior balances while checking in—or even in advance in response to a text or email appointment reminder.

Receiving care

Questions to Explore:

- Do patients come prepared for appointments, including list of meds, at home prep, forms completed, COVID protocols, etc.?
- How do you ask patients about their care experience? Is there a digital survey they can quickly and easily complete within 24 hours of receiving care?

Making Connections:

Feedback can help optimize every step leading up to this point. Make sure you have systems in place to gather, review and maximize patient feedback.

Use appointment reminder outreach, in the channels patients respond to, to ensure patients are prepared for their care.

Fulfilling financial obligations

Questions to Explore:

- Are your billing statements clear and easy to read, even for patients with special communications requirements (i.e., Braille or extra-large print)?
- Do you know what messages each patient should receive and type of statement each patient prefers to receive? (i.e., print or digital)?
- Do you have a method for understanding how much patients can and will pay for their services?
- Would you offer a payment plan if that meant you would eventually receive the full financial obligation?
- Are any preservice payments indicated when the final payment is made?
- Do patients receive multiple statements from various parts of your health system even though all services relate to the same care episode?
- How often do you send statements or reminders, particularly if a payment is overdue?
- Must patients remember user names and passwords to make online payments?
- Is there an intuitive portal option for quickly and easily making payments?
- Do you offer self-service in a multitude of channels to accommodate patient preference—online, over the phone, via text from anywhere?

Making Connections:

Ensure every patient is able to pay in the way that works best for them (i.e., paper, online, phone, text).

Check to make sure the payment options you offer are the best solution for each patient (pay-in-full, payment plans, financial assistance, and patient financing).

Confirm that patients receive the tools they need to make payments on time.

Use text reminders to help patients meet payment due dates, particularly when they are linked to convenient self-serve payment options.

Enable access to self-service options in as few clicks as possible.

Pre-populate information to make access frictionless, without compromising security, to save patients time.

Contacting CSRs

Questions to Explore:

- Are CSRs able to answer questions about discrepancies between billing statements and estimates?
- Do they have the option of taking payments without actually hearing personal credit card or banking information?

Making Connections:

CSRs should have quick and PCI-compliant access to payment information that patients request. However, patients should be able to get quick resolution to questions or issues throughout their entire patient journey.

A consistent patient engagement experience across all touchpoints leads to higher overall engagement, including payments.

Conclusion: Shaping a Better Road Ahead

Once you have a clear grasp of the answers to all of these questions, you are in a position to champion change within your organization: **architecting a patient-centric approach that is nearly effortless for patients**. In fact, with enough insight and empathy, it's possible to make everything from pre-service to payments to a call to your Customer Service Center **a positive, connected and smooth experience for your patients**. A consistent experience helps patients stay on track, regardless of the patient's reason for engagement. When the appearance, messaging content and channel selection are familiar and intuitive for patients, **positive results are sure to follow**.

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