Prioritizing the Patient Experience

Consumerization of Healthcare Brings Patient Satisfaction to Forefront for Providers

west



As the healthcare industry adapts to increasing consumerization, healthcare organizations and providers must expand their efforts to measure and improve patient experiences.



Healthcare providers across the nation are struggling to improve patient satisfaction ratings. The financial health of their organizations depends on it, especially now that patients are demanding better healthcare experiences. At the same time, value-based payment models are using patient satisfaction as a performance measure and tying satisfaction scores to reimbursements.

Patients are more likely to shop around and switch providers if they are not completely satisfied with their care, making it even more evident that patient satisfaction plays a bigger role in determining the financial stability of healthcare organizations. Patients are aware that they have choices when it comes to selecting providers. Their interactions with other businesses and service industries have taught them to have high expectations for their providers and a low tolerance for poor service. As a result, healthcare teams are having to embrace a consumer-centered approach to healthcare and make patient satisfaction a top priority. This report includes findings from two West surveys related to healthcare and patient satisfaction. The first survey, administered by Kelton Global on behalf of West, collected patient experience insights from 1,010 healthcare consumers ages 18 and over in the U.S. The second survey was conducted by West and captured viewpoints from 236 healthcare providers.

Analysis of the survey findings revealed:

- The financial impact of patient satisfaction is growing, partly because of increasing consumerization across healthcare.
- Patient loyalty is tied to satisfaction.
- Patients feel they have options when it comes to choosing providers, and they are selective when picking their providers.
- Improving patient satisfaction can help organizations maximize reimbursements.
- Providers are aware (to some extent) of the need to prioritize patient satisfaction.
- There is a need for better patient experience measurement and analysis to ensure providers are concentrating on areas that matter most to patients.

The Growing Financial Impact of Patient Satisfaction

Patient satisfaction is inextricably linked to the bottom line for healthcare organizations. This is primarily due to two factors:

Evolving payment models tie patient satisfaction to reimbursements.

According to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), \$1.5 billion in valuebased incentive payments were on the line for hospitals in 2016.¹ With Medicare payments at stake, hospitals are more motivated than ever to provide positive patient experiences and perform well on the Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) survey. HCAHPS surveys are based on patientreported experiences, and they are used to assign payment adjustments to hospitals. Failing to do well on these surveys results in negative Medicare payment adjustments. Additionally, research shows a link between HCAHPS scores and a hospital's profitability. According to one study, hospitals with "excellent" HCAHPS patient ratings between 2008 and 2014 had a net margin of 4.7 percent, on average, as compared to just 1.8 percent for hospitals with "low" ratings.²

Increased consumer choice requires providers to meet patients' expectations and deliver positive care experiences to attract and retain patients.

Nearly all (94%) of the patients surveyed believe it is important to feel satisfied with their healthcare provider. For the majority of adults in the U.S., being satisfied with their provider is so crucial that most would diligently research and seek treatment elsewhere if their current healthcare team was not meeting their expectations.

Providers concur. In fact, 93 percent of providers strongly agree that it is important for patients to feel satisfied with their healthcare provider. Ninety-four percent say they notice patients shopping around more for healthcare services today than in the past. Additionally, 81 percent of providers confirm it is highly likely that a patient will switch healthcare providers when dissatisfied.

Patients and Providers Recognize the Importance of Satisfactory Care



of patients say it is important to feel satisfied with their healthcare provider.



94[%]

of providers believe it is important for patients to feel satisfied with their healthcare provider.

of providers say patients are shopping around more today than in the past for healthcare services.



of providers believe it is likely that patients will switch providers when dissatisfied.



of patients confirm they would switch providers without hesitation if dissatisfied. Fortunately, the majority of patients report feeling positive about the care they receive. Nearly three in four patients (73%) say their providers care about them as individuals. That number is even higher for patients with a chronic health condition. Americans with a chronic condition are more likely than those without a chronic condition (78% vs. 69%) to say their providers care about them as individuals.

Providers, however, tend to overestimate their performance in this area, as evidenced by the fact that 86 percent of healthcare providers think patients feel cared for as individuals. What some providers see as an acceptable effort toward patient-centered care does not satisfy some patients, possibly because patients are used to receiving highly personalized service that is tailored to their wants and needs in areas outside of healthcare. Regardless, 81 percent of patients say they feel strongly that their providers are focused on improving their health, and that is a sign that providers are doing the right things.

Of course, the focus can't only be on the patients who feel well cared for. It is important to recognize that a significant number of patients fall outside the realm of satisfaction. Onequarter (27%) of patients do not have a strong sense that their providers care about them as individuals, and nearly one in five patients (19%) are not positive that their providers are focused on improving their health. Considering that the financial welfare of a healthcare organization is intrinsically tied to patient satisfaction, this is a problem that requires attention.



Too Many Patients Are Unhappy



in 4 patients does not have a strong sense their provider cares about them as an individual.



in 3 patients is not entirely convinced their provider is focused on improving their health.



Satisfaction Outweighs Loyalty

Patient satisfaction outweighs patient loyalty, a reality supported by the fact that a whopping 91 percent of Americans are likely to investigate other options if they are not completely satisfied with their current healthcare provider. Furthermore, four in five dissatisfied patients (88%) would switch providers. Nearly 60 percent of providers, and more than three-quarters (78%) of patients, realize patients have the freedom to choose their doctors and care facilities. As a result, providers are concentrating on improving patient satisfaction. Currently, 46 percent of providers say creating a positive patient experience is their top priority; another 50 percent say it is high on their list of priorities.

Patients Will Take Action When Dissatisfied

When patients are not completely satisfied with their healthcare provider:



Look for other healthcare provider options.

(88%)

Are likely to switch healthcare providers.



Millennials are more likely than non-millennials to switch healthcare providers (92% vs. 87%) or put off seeing their healthcare provider (89% vs. 68%) if not completely satisfied. Healthcare providers must adapt to attract and retain this large patient demographic. They need to implement changes now to better address this patient segment's expectations of care.

Millennials Have Less Patience When Satisfaction is in Question

When millennials are not completely satisfied with their healthcare team:



92% are likely to switch healthcare providers.

89% are likely to put off visiting their provider.



Patients Carefully Choose Providers

Although patients are willing to jump from one provider to another, this does not mean patients make decisions about providers on a whim. Patients take their healthcare provider decisions very seriously. Most (59%) admit they invest a lot of time researching healthcare providers before selecting one.



of patients admit they spend a lot of time conducting research before choosing a provider.

Research revealed that millennials are more likely than non-millennials (66% vs. 56%) to diligently research healthcare providers before selecting one. Additionally, women are more likely than men (61% vs. 57%) to spend a lot of time researching providers before choosing one.

The time and effort patients spend researching their providers appears to pay off. Those who say their health improved during the past year (70%) are more likely than those whose health stayed the same (57%) or declined (56%) to devote time to researching healthcare providers before selecting one. Based on this data, it seems plausible that engaged patients who put time into finding a provider that fits their needs may see better health outcomes.

When researching care providers, 50 percent of consumers look for providers who accept their insurance. Location and recommendations from friends and family are also top considerations when researching providers. Forty-four percent of patients look for providers that are located near their home or work, and 43 percent of patients seek out providers that are recommended by friends or family.



Insurance Coverage Tops Search Criteria for Finding Providers

When researching healthcare providers:



50% of patients search for healthcare providers who accept their insurance.



44[%] of patients look for healthcare providers near their home or work.



43[%] of patients use recommendations from friends and family.



37[%] of patients research providers online.



34% of patients use recommendations from other healthcare providers.



31% of patients look at reviews of healthcare providers.



Providers know that recommendations from friends and family are important to healthcare consumers. Eight in ten providers (84%) say patients will search for providers by asking someone in their personal network for recommendations. Providers also expect patients to make care decisions based on a provider's credentials and ability to produce positive outcomes. Additionally, 88 percent of providers believe that a provider's expertise in treating specific illnesses is what matters most to patients. A close second is the provider's reputation for delivering quality care (86%), followed by referrals from other healthcare professionals (82%).



So, what do patients say matters most to them when making the decision? Ultimately, patients say health insurance coverage is a top factor. In fact, 63 percent of patients say that whether a provider is in-network is a top consideration when they are in the market for a healthcare provider. Fifty-seven percent of patients say location is a top priority, and 57 percent feel that their level of satisfaction from a prior experience with a provider matters when choosing whether to continue receiving care from a provider.

Patients Reveal Satisfaction Drivers

Choosing a provider is just the start of the patient journey. To remain with a provider long term, patients need to be satisfied with their care. Although patients consider the basics (like being in-network) when selecting a provider, when it comes to being truly satisfied, patients are more focused on their overall experience with their providers. For example, about half of patients say shorter wait times (50%) and knowing the cost of treatment in advance (49%) are important for improving satisfaction. Specifically, patients say that healthcare providers can improve satisfaction by:

- **50**[%] Shortening wait times
- **49**[%] Providing advance knowledge of care costs
- **47**% Ensuring patients do not feel rushed during appointments
- **44**% Demonstrating a high level of expertise in treating their specific illness
- **41**[%] Making it easier to schedule appointments
- **39**[%] Improving interpersonal or communication skills

- **38**[%] Offering more clarity on all of the available services they offer
- **36**[%] Having a friendlier and more accommodating staff
- **36**[%] Providing a wider range of treatment options
- **27**[%] Providing cleaner or more modern facilities
- 25% Contacting patients via check-ins and follow-ups between appointments





Making it easier for patients to schedule appointments is ranked by patients in the top five factors that impact satisfaction, and it is something that 68 percent of providers are actively working to improve. Unfortunately, providers and patients are not always on the same page. There is a disconnect between what patients want most and where providers are focusing their efforts. For example, healthcare teams are missing the mark by not prioritizing efforts to communicate the outof-pocket costs for services. This is something that nearly half (49%) of patients say is essential to improving patient satisfaction, yet it is ranked nearly last by providers as a priority. Only one-third (33%) of providers say making sure patients know how much it will cost them out of pocket, prior to receiving treatment, is something they are working toward. Despite some mismatched priorities, only five percent of providers state that creating a positive patient experience is not a high priority. This suggests that providers want to make improvements and feel they are doing what is necessary to improve patient satisfaction, even if they don't always understand what is most important to patients.



TOP 5 THINGS **PATIENTS** SAY IMPROVE SATISFACTION

SHORTER WAIT TIMES (50%)

ADVANCE KNOWLEDGE OF TREATMENT COSTS (49%)

NOT FEELING RUSHED DURING APPOINTMENTS (47%)

PROVIDERS HAVING A HIGH LEVEL OF EXPERTISE TREATING SPECIFIC ILLNESSES (44%)

EASY TO SCHEDULE APPOINTMENTS (41%)



TOP 5 THINGS HEALTHCARE TEAMS SAY THEY ARE ACTIVELY WORKING TO PRIORITIZ

ENSURING STAFF IS FRIENDLY AND ACCOMMODATING (73%)

MAKING IT EASIER TO SCHEDULE APPOINTMENTS (68%)

KEEPING PATIENT WAIT TIMES SHORT (62%)

IMPROVING COMMUNICATION WITH PATIENTS (54%)

PROVIDING A CLEAN AND MODERN FACILITY (48%)



Chronic Patients' Satisfaction Deserves Additional Attention

Almost two-thirds (66%) of patients agree that healthcare in America does not effectively help those with chronic illnesses manage their conditions. Additionally, 85 percent of Americans with a chronic condition say they have care options and can choose to get treatment elsewhere if they're not satisfied with their provider. Thus, it is critical that healthcare organizations devote more attention to improving satisfaction among chronic patients. Communicating with patients at home and in the course of daily life is one way providers can successfully engage patients and improve satisfaction levels.

of chronic patients look for providers that communicate with patients between appointments. **66%**

of patients with a chronic condition say they would be more likely to stay with their healthcare team if their personal health data was monitored remotely and interventions were made if something appeared wrong.

\$6

0% of chronic patients would be willing to pay extra (up to \$10 per month) for between-visit support.

For patients who suffer from a chronic condition, a strong relationship with their healthcare provider is of the utmost importance. Therefore, providers need to focus on meeting patient expectations to ensure satisfaction as part of chronic care efforts.

Maximize Technology-Enabled Engagement Communications to Improve the Patient Experience

Understanding patient satisfaction drivers and making sure provider priorities are aligned is critical. But, addressing those patient priorities is where providers need to bring their "A" game. Fortunately, they can use technology-enabled engagement communications to make the adjustments necessary to address patient priorities. Here are some ways providers can leverage their appointment reminder technology to improve patient experiences in the areas that matter most to patients:

Shorter Wait Times

Half (50%) of patients say shorter wait times would improve satisfaction. Engagement communications can be used to adequately communicate wait times and in some cases, prevent long waits when providers are running behind. Just as an airline notifies customers when a flight is delayed, healthcare teams can notify patients when a physician is delayed. Providers can leverage notifications technology integrated with their EMR or EHR system to send patients text messages when their doctor is behind schedule. Patients that receive these messages can adjust their arrival time so they can spend less time sitting in the waiting room. Post-visit surveys can also be used to ask patients to share their opinions about the amount of time they waited during their most recent visit.



Advance Knowledge of Costs



A healthcare experience can get off to a bad start very quickly if a patient is not prepared to pay a required copayment. Sending pre-appointment messages that not only remind

patients to bring their insurance information, but also verify in advance whether their plan requires a copay, helps reduce surprise expenses. When patients know their copay obligations in advance and show up to appointments with their insurance card and the correct payment in hand, the checkin process goes more smoothly. Insurance and copayment reminders can be delivered easily using a provider's appointment reminder system. Additionally, high-deductible health plans have made out-of-pocket expenses more worrisome for patients. To reduce delays and confusion in the post-appointment collection process, providers can use pre-appointment messages to give patients advance notice that insurance will only cover a portion of the healthcare service being provided. Doing so helps patients know before they arrive at their appointment that they should expect to receive an online or mailed bill following the visit and gives them more time to plan for medical expenses. It also builds better communication surrounding the topic of cost. That communication can be helpful for getting patients and providers to work together to minimize patients' out-of-pocket medical costs by doing things like choosing specialists or facilities that are in-network, and considering lower-cost alternatives for treatments. It also opens the conversation for setting patients up on payment plans when needed.

Unhurried Appointments

The time when patients are face-to-face with their provider can feel like it passes quickly. It is important for providers to let patients know they are valued and give them as many opportunities as possible to ask questions and discuss their healthcare needs. Engagement communications can be used to ensure the time patients and providers spend together is maximized. Providers can use their appointment reminder technology to send automated pre-appointment messages to remind patients to be on time, while also letting them know that they are welcome to ask questions throughout the appointment. Messages can suggest that patients think about what they want to discuss with their healthcare team during the appointment, and assure patients that their provider cares about taking time to listen to them. Post-appointment emails are also helpful because they extend conversations beyond the clinical setting. Providers can send follow-up emails after appointments to reiterate important care instructions and give patients directions on what to do if they have any issues or additional questions.



Provider Expertise

Nearly half (44%) of patients say demonstrating a high level of expertise in treating their specific illness would improve satisfaction. Patients want to feel



confident in the abilities of those caring for their health. Medical providers can send between-visit communications to demonstrate that they are engaged and interested in continuously supporting patients with valuable resources and information. A text message with a link to a video on the preventive benefits of a balanced diet, a voice message inviting patients to schedule a flu shot, and an email with patient-specific disease management information are examples of engagement communications that reinforce a provider's expertise and dedication. A regular email newsletter highlighting patient success stories is another useful tactic to demonstrate expertise. Whether it's showcasing a cancer survivor, a diabetic patient who is successfully managing his disease, or a patient who has used diet and exercise to get his blood pressure and cholesterol levels in check, patients want to know their healthcare provider has successfully treated other patients who have their specific ailment.

Easy Appointment Scheduling

Providers can use their appointment reminder technology to send automated emails, voicemails or text messages notifying patients that they



are due for an exam and need to schedule an appointment. The messages can be set up to allow patients to easily connect to a staff member who can help them set up an appointment. Additionally, most providers already send appointment reminders to patients a day or two before scheduled appointments. When those reminders include an option for patients to reschedule or cancel appointments they are unable to keep, providers can offer last-minute openings to other patients. Preventing no-shows is beneficial to patients who are waiting to get into the office for an appointment and is also beneficial to providers. As providers work to make appointment scheduling easier, they can send patients surveys to collect their feedback on the appointment scheduling process.

Improved Communication

Nearly four in ten patients (39%) say better communication improves satisfaction. An automated voice message to let a patient know they are due for a preventive screening, a text message to alert a patient of an upcoming payment deadline, or an email that shares tips for managing a chronic health condition are examples of communications providers can send to support patients between visits and improve satisfaction. These and other between-visit communication tactics can easily be executed by using existing appointment reminder technology in new ways. So much of what contributes to patient satisfaction happens at times and places that are outside of the clinical setting. Thus, it is critical providers follow up with patients after appointments and check in regularly to carry their services beyond the walls of their facilities. For some patients, this might involve sending occasional emails with customized wellness tips. For others, follow-up communications should be much more involved. For example, a patient with diabetes or another chronic health condition can be sent messages prompting them to complete check-in surveys. These check-ins could be one to three question surveys that ask patients to rate their pain, report their blood glucose, or input a different health metric for their provider to monitor. The level of required follow-up varies from patient to patient. Patients that are in relatively good health may require fewer follow-up communications, whereas patients with chronic conditions may need frequent monitoring. Either way, the goal is to use engagement communications to support patients between appointments.

Information about Available Services

Patients indicate that having access to a wide range of services (and knowing how to take advantage of those services) drives satisfaction. Preventive services can help keep patients healthy and happy. However, many patients do not have a clear understanding of the preventive services that are available to them or the costs associated with utilizing those services. Sending patients messages to educate them about services like childhood immunizations, well-woman exams, and cholesterol tests for middle-aged adults helps bring the availability of these services are available to them with no out-of-pocket costs is even more helpful.

Friendly and Accommodating Staff

Patients expect staff to be friendly and accommodating. Interactions between patients and front office staff can greatly influence patients'



perceptions of their care experiences. One thing staff members can do to set the stage for positive patient experiences is to correctly capture the communication preferences of each patient. For example, front office staff can walk patients through the signup process for a patient portal and help them set their communication preferences. By doing so, staff can ensure that important communications are delivered through the channels patients desire. This increases the odds that patients will receive and respond to communications. Additionally, providers can use automated notifications to encourage patients to schedule annual wellness exams. Following the wellness visit, providers can accommodate the needs of chronic patients by enrolling eligible patients in chronic care

management programs that offer between-visit support. Medicare chronic care management programs allow patients to receive a number of benefits, including a 20-minute monthly phone call with a registered nurse. Providers are reimbursed \$40 per month for each patient that enrolls and pays a monthly fee of \$8. Sixty-six percent of chronic patients surveyed would be willing to pay up to \$10 per month for additional support, so there are many opportunities to get patients set up with these programs. Providers can leverage their appointment reminder system to schedule support calls between patients and registered nurses. The bonus of enrolling patients in chronic care management programs is that providers can receive a revenue boost. According to one study published in the Annals of Internal Medicine, a typical medical practice would see a net revenue increase with approximately \$332 of revenue gain per enrolled patient per year if chronic care management services were to be delivered by registered nurses.³

Modern Facilities

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It is not surprising that patients say clean and modern facilities contribute to satisfaction. Modern facilities make patients more comfortable and create a general feeling that providers are on

the leading edge of healthcare. Bringing technology into waiting areas helps build a more modern setting. Providers can provide tablets in waiting areas that patients can use to complete satisfaction surveys, provide feedback, access online portals, watch video messages from providers, or view other healthcare content. New technology and innovative methods of delivering information help feed perceptions of a modern environment.

The examples below show sample survey questions that hospitals might send to patients:

During this hospital stay, was your pain well controlled?

Press 1 for never Press 2 for sometimes Press 3 for usually Press 4 for always

During this hospital stay, did doctors explain things in a way you could understand?

Press 1 for never Press 2 for sometimes Press 3 for usually Press 4 for always

Would you recommend this hospital to your friends and family?

Press 1 for very unlikely Press 2 for unlikely Press 3 for likely Press 4 for very likely

Physicians can also employ this strategy of sending short surveys to patients. A physician may ask questions like:

During office visits, is the staff friendly and helpful throughout the check-in process?

Press 1 for never Press 2 for sometimes Press 3 for usually Press 4 for always

Is the amount of time you spend in the waiting room at our office appropriate?

Press 1 for never Press 2 for sometimes Press 3 for usually Press 4 for always

Measuring and Improving the Patient Experience

There is a need for better patient experience measurement and analysis among providers. The data collected through HCAHPS surveys allows hospitals to see what they are doing well in the eyes of patients, as well as what areas need improvement. However, if hospitals rely on data from HCAHPS as their main source of information regarding patient experience, they are forced to be reactive rather than proactive about making improvements. Rather than waiting and responding to results of HCAHPS surveys, a better solution is for hospitals to continuously collect their own data and use it to identify areas of weakness. With this approach, improvements can be made proactively. Hospitals should constantly be conducting brief surveys and using the responses to address any and all performance issues before those issues cause a negative financial impact. This strategy is also effective when employed by healthcare practices.

Hospitals and healthcare systems should contact recently-discharged patients and ask them to complete a brief survey. These surveys can be much shorter versions of the HCAHPS surveys—perhaps eight or nine questions in length. Distributing surveys is simple—providers can use their appointment reminder technology to automatically send messages that encourage patients to complete a survey about the care they received. Then, patients simply need to respond using a touch tone phone. Generally, surveys should be delivered within 48 hours of discharge.

When developing short surveys, organizations can include questions related to the categories on the HCAHPS survey. For example, questions may ask about care from nurses, care from doctors, the hospital environment, or discharge procedures.





Using shorter surveys to regularly capture patientreported information gives healthcare teams a continuous look at their performance and makes it possible to accurately measure satisfaction by providing an ongoing patient feedback loop that allows healthcare organizations the opportunity to continually and proactively modify processes in an effort to improve patient satisfaction.

Surveys help healthcare teams collect data, but that information is only useful if the data can be quickly and easily analyzed. For example, if the healthcare team in charge of patient experience can see the survey data visualized on a performance dashboard, they can identify areas where the hospital is scoring exceptionally low. When the team drills down further into the data, it may find that 10 clinics within their facility are failing in one area in particular, for example. With an even more granular view of the data, the team can identify the specific doctors who are responsible for the low satisfaction ratings from patients. This level of insight can be used by healthcare organizations to make real improvements that will raise satisfaction scores, as it allows them to impact patient satisfaction at the critical point of provider-patient interaction. The same appointment reminder technology hospitals use to capture survey responses likely offers the dashboard and analytics needed to drill down into data and measure satisfaction.



It is clear that healthcare organizations have a number of reasons to prioritize patient satisfaction, and many of those are financially motivated. Medicare already penalizes hospitals for low satisfaction scores, and private payers will likely follow suit. Additionally, consumerization has finally made its way to healthcare. Patients today simply do not feel obligated to stay with healthcare organizations that are not delivering the high-quality experiences they expect. Healthcare organizations need to quickly adapt by expanding their focus on measuring and improving patient experiences. They can do this by using surveys to gather data and analytics that clearly identify what factors are helping or hurting their patient satisfaction levels. They can also leverage their appointment reminder technology to deliver engagement communications that drive better care experiences. Success requires understanding what drives patient satisfaction, identifying areas where providers are underperforming, and implementing processes for improvement.

About West

West's Engagement Center Solutions help organizations effectively activate and engage patients beyond the clinical setting. West's unique combination of technology-enabled communications and clinically managed resources are designed to improve patient engagement by solving complex communication challenges in four key areas along the care continuum: Patient Access, Routine Care, Chronic Care and Transition Care. West has successfully helped businesses and organizations in many industries from airlines, to utilities, to financial services improve consumer experiences and satisfaction. West has brought its deep knowledge of building great consumer experiences to healthcare. By providing innovative technology and delivering meaningful and

relevant communications, West enables healthcare organizations to optimize the patient experience, improve quality, maximize revenue and reduce costs.

West is a leading provider of technology-driven communications, serving Fortune 1000 companies and clients in a variety of industries, including: healthcare, telecommunications, retail, financial services, public safety, and technology.





Learn more about how West is changing healthcare: west.com/healthcare televox.com

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