THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN PATIENT ENGAGEMENT

PhoneTree
WHAT IS PATIENT ENGAGEMENT?

Patient Engagement
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Patient engagement is a strategy that combines a patient’s willingness, skills, ability and knowledge in managing his or her own health and healthcare with interventions that encourage positive patient behaviors.

An engaged patient is not only well aware of their health conditions, but also actively participates in their own health and wellbeing.

While patient engagement is an industry buzzword, it’s not a new concept. For example, in business, it’s “consumer engagement”—when customers are provided with tips and other information so that they have better experiences and greater brand loyalty. This in turn leads to sales.

But patient engagement isn’t just a buzzword in healthcare—it’s a trend. According to a recent CDW Healthcare survey, 70% of providers have seen a positive change in their patients’ engagement, and 58% of providers say they have improved their patient engagement over the past two years.

The healthcare industry recognizes that success in a competitive marketplace means that patients should receive more information, access, and quality in care.

Over time, successful patient engagement translates to improved overall health and decreased healthcare costs.
Patient engagement technology is consumer-facing technology that aims to involve patients in their health care and includes everything from vital-tracking wearables (like Fitbits) to social media strategies, apps, and online “patient portals.”

According to the International Data Cooperation, 115.7 million wearables will ship in 2019, compared to the 72.1 million that shipped in 2014.

Meanwhile, tools like patient portals allow patients to schedule appointments, make payments, or access personal health data such as medical records and test results online. The CDW Healthcare survey results show that 74% of patients “believe better online access to their personal healthcare information would help them take a more active role in their own healthcare.”

And it turns out, interest and trust in health technology is not limited by age. The Senior Health and Technology Survey conducted last year showed that older adults are also primed for such patient engagement tools. Over 80 percent of respondents said that technology is part of their everyday lives and 56 percent said they would use a “patient portal or other healthcare platform” via their computer or smart phone.
Patient engagement technology could be particularly beneficial to not only older adults, who have increasing healthcare needs, but also to chronically ill patients. For such groups with increased provider-patient communication needs, patient engagement technology like portals can simplify interactions for both provider and patient by:

- Creating a way for patients to send a message to their provider when they have a simple or non-urgent question
- Decreasing the number of phone calls and reducing employee time looking for patient information
- Preventing unnecessary visits to the doctor’s office or getting needed appointments scheduled online (according to an eClinicalWorks survey, 60% of patients are likely to schedule appointments via a patient portal or secure website)
- Giving patients ownership in their care, allowing them to build a partnership of care with their providers.

Other benefits of patient engagement technology include:

- **Improved workflow:** More information is shared and available to both patient and provider, paperwork is eliminated or reduced, patients can review their own health information for accuracy, scheduling is improved with reduced no-shows, and patients are more compliant with payments.
- **Population health data:** With improved health information systems, researchers can analyze health data to identify trends.
- **Greater patient satisfaction:** More communication and access to health information means patients are more confident with their health knowledge and their diagnoses or conditions. It also leads to improved outcomes and care quality with better adherence to medical treatments through alerts and reminders.
- **Increased communication:** Providers and patients can communicate more frequently, meaningfully, and efficiently regarding updates on patient conditions from multiple devices (laptop, tablet, or smart phone).
PUTTING THE “CARE” BACK IN HEALTHCARE

Implementing patient engagement technology is not without its challenges. Providers should be prepared for various obstacles, from workforce reluctance, to technology ease of use, different communication styles, and operational challenges.

But say your organization has successfully implemented several patient engagement technologies. You offer a regularly updated provider website and have incorporated a patient portal. Does this mean your patients are participating actively in their health and wellness?

The answer, unfortunately, is no. Just because a patient can view their health information online doesn’t mean they fully understand it or the next steps they should be taking. In fact, they may not even know how to access or use their patient portal properly in the first place. Patients will still need guidance and the ability to pick up the phone and talk through their access problems with someone.

Providing access to the technology is great groundwork, but true patient participation requires human interaction and support. According to the CDW Healthcare survey, when asked what their motivation was for increased engagement, patients ranked greater provider communication as being just as significant as a life event.

“Patient engagement technology offers new communication tools that, when used well with provider encouragement, can become an integral piece of empowering patients in their care and improving patient outcomes.”
Simply put, technology is not the expert in care. Providers are. Instead, patient engagement technology offers new communication tools that, when used well with provider encouragement, can become an integral piece of empowering patients in their care and improving patient outcomes.

But because of its usefulness to both patient and provider, patient engagement technology is here to stay. Accenture’s report “Healthcare IT: Top 5 ehealth Trends Reshaping the Industry in 2015” holds that through health technology:

- The healthcare experience is more personalized and convenient for patients.
- Patient engagement and access to care increase.
- Patients are provided with real-time health information and more self-monitoring devices.
- Patients gain greater access to their personal medical records.
- Providers will be more efficient and patient care improved.
WANT TO EXPLORE PATIENT ENGAGEMENT TOOLS WITH YOUR ORGANIZATION?

PhoneTree® offers communication technology that healthcare providers can use to communicate with patients via phone, text and email. Our phone, text and email technology can be used to construct patient communication flows that support patient appointment compliance, thereby reducing no-shows and no-goes.

Because the technology is not encrypted, it cannot be used to send ePHI (electronic protected health information). However, it can be used to send non-ePHI - including links to patient portals (where patients can then securely access their ePHI). It is also used to send appointment reminders and pre-appointment instructions, among other things. Contact us today to learn more about our patient communication solutions.

At PhoneTree®, we’re in the business of helping people. We use our top-of-the-line messaging solutions to inspire your patients to do the things you need them to do. With automated phone call, text messaging and email software, you can help motivate people to act while empowering them with information. With over 25 years in business, nobody understands better than PhoneTree the power of well-crafted patient communication.
Sources


