BRIDGING THE GAP IN PATIENT EXPERIENCE AND PATIENT CARE IN THE DIGITAL AGE

How Medical Practices Can Utilize Digital Technology to Communicate and Care for Patients from Baby Boomers to Gen Zers
Medicine has invested extensive effort into understanding how to bridge the gap in patient experience and patient care. In its earliest days, patient care was usually a highly-personalized experience. One physician might know all members of a family, and would even provide care from birth through death.

As society advanced, providers became more specialized, making it difficult to continue providing those high levels of personal care. Dealing with insurance companies and government regulations added layer after layer of administrative burdens for practitioners, taking away valuable time from patient care.

Adding to these complexities is the fact that patients seldom fall into one homogenous group. Some practices specialize in pediatrics or geriatrics but most offer family, internal or general medicine, treating patients in their 20s to those in 70s. Each generation has different backgrounds, perspectives and capabilities, and may prefer a different type of patient experience.

These challenges have been exacerbated during the digital age, as providers also struggle to keep up with current technology while still building patient rapport. Digital advances in communication and practice administration have made astounding leaps, but they need to be incorporated in ways that enhance the patient experience.

The problem is that each generation may react to these changes differently. Younger patients readily participate in telehealth, while older patients might be reluctant to embrace this solution which could make their and the provider’s life easier.

MAIN FOCUS OF THE WHITE PAPER

The goal of this white paper is to explain how generational differences impact patient experience in the digital age. It will look at the perceived use of technology across various generations, and how this shapes the way they want to interact with providers. Finally, it will educate readers on the diverse types of technology, workflow, payment options, and patient care techniques that providers can successfully adopt, to meet the needs and digital savviness of each age group/generation.

“There are generations yet unborn, whose very lives will be shifted and shaped by the moves you make and the actions you take.”

– Andy Andrews
WHAT IS NEEDED TO CREATE A POSITIVE PATIENT EXPERIENCE?

To better integrate patient care with digital technology, it is necessary to understand what patients want from healthcare providers. A personal doctor-patient relationship is the most important hallmark of quality care. Regardless of age or health status, the majority of consumers want a doctor who is experienced and knowledgeable, listens to their concerns, explains things clearly, and spends as much time as necessary. Patients also expect medical teams to have their current and complete medical information, regardless of where they may receive care. Coordination matters most to patients with chronic or complex medical conditions, including diabetes and cancer.

Findings from the Deloitte 2018 Health Care Consumer Survey showed that improving engagement at three key touchpoints in a consumer's health care journey could help health care stakeholders improve patient outcomes and reduce the cost of care. These key points included searching for care, accessing new channels of care (e.g., digital tools), and sharing personal health information.

When looking at the overall needs of patients, what is most important can be grouped into three broad categories:

- **Emotional Experience**
  Patients want to be valued, listened to, and seen as a partner in their own healthcare. Meeting the emotional needs of patients requires understanding that patients want to be heard.

- **Technical Experience**
  Patients want to work with providers who use technology to improve the care experience. Meeting technical needs means having internal systems that improve appointments, chart-keeping, and patient communications, while seamlessly integrating with billing systems to alleviate payment frustrations.

- **Billing Experience**
  Billing challenges often overwhelm the effectiveness of a positive provider encounter. Patients want to understand their payment responsibility. Accuracy in billing can be addressed and improved throughout the patient experience, from insurance verification at the time of appointment, through claim submission, and on to the collection of any outstanding amounts. Technology can improve the billing process, so practices can accurately manage, identify and confirm patient insurance benefit eligibility levels and copay requirements at the time of appointment, thereby reducing their frustration.

IMPROVING GENERATIONAL PATIENT EXPERIENCES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Pew Research Center studies have found that knowing an individual’s age can be an effective predictor of understanding differences in attitudes and behaviors, ranging from beliefs about foreign affairs and social policy, to preferences in medical care.

Medical practices have many technologies available in billing and patient care, but have to be aware that acceptance might be unique to each generation. Baby Boomers are still most comfortable with face-to-face, telephone and email communication, for example, while younger generations tend to favor texts, instant messages, and the instant gratification of the internet. One positive measure that may have come out of the pandemic is an increased acceptance of telehealth as a means of delivering care.

Digital technology and overall patient needs and care must be designed and implemented with generational groups in mind. So, how can medical practices best use technology to bridge the gap in patient experience and patient care? Let’s take a look at how the Digital Age applies to the generational experience.
Baby Boomers, who were born between 1946 and 1964, are now in their late-50s to mid-70s and beginning to experience more complicated health issues. They are older, have more medical needs due to aging and chronic conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, COPD, and arthritis, and are more likely to have the insurance coverage to pay for it.

Ways to improve their patient experience include:

**Emotional Experience:**
They value a personal relationship, so look for ways to build on that. Show them how to use your patient portal to exchange messages, make payments and review test results. The best way to approach them to set appointments or discuss their treatment plan is via telephone, rather than by text. Use emails, so they can read information on what they are supposed to do, and provide access to printed brochures or website pages that include education on their medical concerns.

**Technical Experience:**
They use the internet to conduct research when it comes to their own healthcare. They are great fans of Facebook, and enjoy content that offers information they can review in their free time. COVID realities and emerging technologies may change their mind about communication capabilities, self-monitoring, and information access. Facebook posts, blog articles, reviews, and educational videos work well with this group. Older generations are starting to become more comfortable with the telemedicine process. They may still need more education and support, however, to continue using this option as a supplement to their in-person appointments.

**Billing Experience:**
Their billing can be more complicated, as it will usually involve Medicare and Medicare supplement plans. Your practice needs to have a billing system that takes these variations into account and provides complete clarity on their payment responsibility. They don’t want to deal with tons of paperwork, and suddenly learn they owe a lot which their budget can’t afford.

**Solutions:** Most Baby Boomers have used smartphones and computers, and are ready to adapt to most modern changes in technology.

1. Be open to the concept of home monitoring devices, to receive updated health data from them.
2. Use a mix of telephone, email and patient portal as preferred modes of communication.
3. Offer high quality and personalized health care.
4. Educate them on the importance of using the patient portal to access information, including booking appointments and sending/receiving messages.
5. Pay attention to your reputation management, as this generation relies on word-of-mouth references or online reviews.
Gen X - Middle Agers

Gen Xers, who were born from 1965 through 1980, are just into their 40s and 50s - that dreaded time known as “middle age.” Although they might still have older children at home, they are beginning to look toward their own “golden years.” They were raised by workaholic Baby Boomer parents, and became fiercely independent as they grew older.

Emotional Experience:
Many Gen X patients will conduct their own research before coming to an in-person appointment, and may even have a list of questions ready for their provider. They want to be a participant in the process, rather than someone who is simply told what to do by an “authoritative power.” Education and communication are important, and they may also be interested in alternative therapies as part of their treatment plan.

Technical Experience:
Most are not afraid of technology, as they were the first generation to really grow up with it. They may use a variety of sources, such as social media, to find the right healthcare provider. They read on-line reviews such as those found on Yelp!, Google, and Healthgrades, and will factor them into their decision-making process. They can easily navigate text messages, smartphones, and patient portals that may be used to improve communication with their healthcare professionals.

Billing Experience:
Their billing can be more convenient. They are often at the height of their careers in high-paced jobs, and have an active family and social life at home. Convenient billing and appointment options are crucial in their patient experience. They value speed, and have little patience to work through billing problems with providers and payers.

Generations are one way to group age cohorts. A generation typically refers to groups of people born over a 15-20 year span.”

—Pew Research

Solutions:

1. Start introducing the concept of home health monitoring devices to receive updated health data on emerging health conditions.

2. Use a mix of text and patient portal as quick, efficient modes of communication.

3. Look at ways of improving your online presence and patient reviews.

4. Educate them on the importance of using the patient portal to access information, including booking appointments and sending/receiving messages.

5. Offer high quality and personalized health care.
GEN Y – THE MILLENNIALS

Born between 1981 and 1996, this generation is now between the ages of 26 and 41, and accounts for about 30% of the U.S. population. They witnessed the birth of the digital age, and have become accustomed to dealing with it. Now beginning careers and families, they look for convenience in everything they do – from ordering groceries to managing their family’s healthcare.

**Emotional Experience:**
While they might not need the personal touch of the older generations, this group still values a positive overall experience. They want input from trusted providers and their peers, and are not afraid to do their own research. Help them by providing access to reputable resources and consider providing ways to interact with others with similar conditions without affecting confidentiality.

**Technical Experience:**
Don’t make them wade through a challenging phone system to set appointments, update prescriptions, or get answers. Use your online capabilities to make these processes fast and efficient. Constant communication is crucial for this generation. Use instant messaging, and make sure all communications are mobile-friendly. For them, bite-sized content is better, so turn to brief emails or short social media updates to keep them in the loop.

**Billing Experience:**
They may switch jobs or insurance providers yearly and need to know your medical practice can work with various insurance providers to submit claims and receive payments quickly and accurately. They don’t have time to deal with unnecessary bills or to serve as a liaison between provider and payer.

**Solutions**
Convenience works for this busy group as they juggle careers, home life, and social activities for their families. They don’t want to waste time going back and forth with various providers, and don’t want to deal with a lot of paperwork.

1. Make patient care as fast and easy as possible.
2. Promote interoperability in patient care.
3. Emphasize patient portal communication capabilities.
4. Be familiar with, and adopt, the latest digital health trends and technology such as wearables and mobile health applications.
5. Make telehealth a vital part of patient care.
6. Develop a stronger patient-provider connection. Build stronger online reviews.
7. Have an active social media presence. Offer high quality and personalized health care.
GEN Z – THE FUTURE

This generation represents patients born between 1997 and 2010. They are in their teens or early 20s, and often still qualify for pediatric care under their parents’ health coverage. With a total of about 68 million members, Gen Z is totally comfortable with the digital world, and will be responsible for demanding even greater changes in the way it is delivered in the future. This generation is perfectly fine with all forms of text reminders, updates, and online patient portals.

**Emotional Experience:**
Younger patients might be the easiest to please emotionally, but they can also be the most fickle. They might change providers without any advance notice, so keep connected and build value for staying with your practice. Provide education on current health topics, and help create habits that will last a lifetime.

**Technical Experience:**
These patients especially want to know that providers have access to all their medical information in one place. Use an EHR that allows providers to input charting details during appointments, and has interoperability with outside labs, diagnostic centers, and medical specialists. They are more open to the idea of a virtual appointment, and may even begin to demand it more in the future.

**Billing Experience:**
They want things to be fast and easy. Use online payments, and don’t add stress with confusing or inaccurate billing processes. They want providers who can work with and receive reimbursement from many carriers.

**Solutions:** Your practice will really have to ramp up its digital game to effectively work with these patients in the future. Start now by: Marketing your practice, and becoming more active in social media.

1. Having the right EHR.
2. Offering telemedicine for patient care.
3. Providing access to online payments through various sources.
4. Incorporating an interactive patient portal for appointments, billing, messages.
5. Using text messages and the patient portal as your main source of communication.
KEY TAKEAWAYS ON GENERATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN HEALTHCARE

Patients and providers have a very close relationship because they are dealing with the most personal of issues – health and well-being. Older patients may cling to traditional ideas about the doctor-patient relationship, but they want to feel valued most of all. Younger patients have changed their understanding of how medical care is delivered, and focus more on the ease of receiving that care. It is up to providers to utilize the latest technology to meet the needs of patients in all age groups. **Key takeaways include:**

**Be a partner in the healthcare process:** Use your resources to provide education to help patients understand their diagnosis and treatment plans. A healthcare portal can be the key to building relationships.

**Manage expectations:** Older patients expect to have direct access to their healthcare providers, and they often have the insurance coverage to pay for it. Younger patients might not require such direct contact, but they expect to have instant access from the comfort of their smartphone.

**Internal workflow:** A practice that operates efficiently is important to all age groups. Use digital technology to establish a workflow that meets patient needs and improves practice efficiency.

All of today’s patients want rapid access to medical professionals, along with high-quality technical and interpersonal care. The healthcare industry is rapidly responding to the push to drive consumer engagement by creating digital tools and strategies to help patients become more involved in healthcare delivery. Medical practices can utilize these tools to bridge the gap in patient experience and improve patient care, while meeting practice revenue needs.

PRACTICES CAN RELY ON PROGNOCIS WHEN BRIDGING DIGITAL GAP IN PATIENT CARE

PrognoCIS by Bizmatics is proud to be part of Harris Computer Company. We have been providing digital technology to help medical practices bridge the gap in patient experience and patient care for over 18 years. Our expert team is dedicated to allowing physicians to tailor their workflow to meet the needs of the practice and patients of all age groups. Our solutions include:

**Electronic Health Records (EHR):** The Electronic Health Record system from PrognoCIS offers a customizable workflow designed for your practice.

**e-Prescribing Software:** e-Prescription technology improves prescription accuracy, minimizes lost or unfilled prescriptions, and saves time.

**Telemedicine:** Our fully-integrated telehealth application allows your practice to increase patient engagement by treating patients anytime, anywhere, across all connected devices.

**Patient Portal:** Highly-functioning healthcare portals from PrognoCIS are your gateway to improved patient communication and quality care.

**Online Patient Payments:** Collect patient co-pays and advances securely and efficiently via credit card transactions.

**Practice Management:** Seamlessly integrating with PrognoCIS EHR, our Practice Management solution allows quick and easy billing management.

PrognoCIS has the digital technology and industry expertise to streamline and simplify the execution of tasks and processes in your practice, and help bridge the gap in patient experience and patient care. Visit our website at [www.prognocis.com](http://www.prognocis.com) or call 408-873-3030 to request a demo or ask about our interactive and intuitive workflow that is designed to meet patient needs and improve practice efficiency.
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