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5 Evidence-Based Patient Engagement Strategies

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According to the New England Journal of Medicine Catalyst Insights Council Survey, only 34% of healthcare leaders and clinicians believe that their patients are highly engaged. This statistic illuminates a key problem for providers, considering that patient engagement is essential to the achievement of the Triple Aim: improved health outcomes, better patient experience, and lower costs. From patient portals to omnichannel marketing campaigns, here are five evidence-based patient engagement strategies to improve patient adherence and retention.

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What is Patient Engagement?

Patient engagement focuses on the capacity for providers and patients to work together improve health outcomes. While patient activation refers to a patient's ability to manage his or her own health, patient engagement focuses on interventions to drive activation and positive patient behavior.

According to the National Institutes of Health, patient activation progresses in four stages: (1) believing the patient role is important, (2) having the confidence and knowledge necessary to take action, (3) actually taking action to maintain and improve one's health, and (4) staying the course even under stress. As providers well know, patients need quite a bit of nudging to move along the patient activation process. Therefore, patient engagement plays a critical role in adherence and compliance.

How to Improve Patient Engagement in Healthcare

Patient engagement research shows that the least-engaged patients are twice as likely to delay care and are three times more likely to have unmet medical needs than the most-engaged patients. The following five patient engagement strategies are proven to help improve health care utilization and outcomes.

1. Segment Your Patient Population

The aim of patient segmentation is to personalize patient engagement resources, thus ensuring that each person's health needs are addressed more effectively. Patient segmentation uses data from administrative systems or electronic health records (EHRs) to divide a patient population into distinct groups, which can then be targeted with tailored engagement campaigns. To create an effective patient segmentation model, you must first create broad patient profiles to understand how, when, and where to reach each type of patient.

While there are strict guidelines around use of patient health information for marketing purposes, healthcare providers can use their patient list to send communications about their own products or services. For example, a provider can send a flyer about its weight loss program to all patients defined as obese, even if the treatment they received was not for obesity.

Since segmentation models rely on demographic characteristics, geographic location, and medical conditions or history, healthcare providers must take care that patient ePhi is protected. To segment your patient database using ePHI without violating HIPAAA, use a HIPAA-compliant email marketing solution or direct mail provider after obtaining appropriate permissions and opt-ins. By breaking down your patients into primary segments, you can personalize your marketing campaigns, which in turn increases the likelihood of your patients to take desired actions.

2. Provide Education to Improve Patient Adherence & Compliance

As a healthcare provider, it is important to integrate patient engagement strategies that allow patients to take ownership of their respective health journeys. According to the American Journal of Medicine, as many as 40% to 50% of patients with chronic disease do not adhere to their prescribed medications, leading to at least 100,000 preventable deaths and $100 billion in preventable medical costs per year.

Staying connected to your patients between visits can improve patient adherence and compliance, leading to good clinical outcomes and a higher quality of life for patients. To ensure patients of all backgrounds benefit from your engagement strategy, create relevant patient educational materials, which can also be accessed online, that provide follow-up information after individual visits to ongoing care information for chronic conditions.

Resource can include, but are not limited to the following:

+ Brochures or Printed Materials   + Webinars

+ Posters or Charts   + YouTube Videos

+ Infographics   + Digital Content

+ Group Classes or Workshops   + Patient Portal

+ Podcasts   + Access to Healthcare Providers

Unfortunately, many patient education materials have a moderate to low level of understandability and actionability. According to one assessment based on patient education materials, 55.3% of patient materials were moderately difficult and 81.6% were written at eight-grade or ninth-grade reading level. To ensure both patient satisfaction and ongoing engagement, all information should be presented at the sixth-grade reading level to ensure maximum readability.

3. Develop an Omnichannel Engagement Strategy

Patients now expect practitioners to provide transparent, responsive, and open communication, in part due to individual demand for better awareness and involvement in their health. After you segment your patient population and identify the types of education you want to provide to each segment, you can successfully target the specific segments of patients through customized, omnichannel campaigns. Five channels that healthcare organizations should use to interact with patients include:

Direct Mail

Direct mail consists of flyers, letters, postcards, brochures, and other paper-based ad formats to market to patients. Done right, direct mail marketing builds trust, solidifies practice authority, and leads to more engaged patients, which in turn boosts brand awareness and drives patient traffic. As with other segments of your marketing strategy, it is important to measure ROI after executing each campaign to see what works, what doesn't work, and tailor your strategy on a go-forward basis.

Phone Calls

Mobile calling or texting is the preferred route of communication for many patients. Therefore, modern patient engagement should involve outreach via a cloud-based phone system. This requires integrating your CRM with a reliable healthcare phone system to track all calls and schedule follow-up appointment reminders.

93%

Patients that are likely to select a physician who offers communication via e-mail

30%

Patients who actively use their primary care physician's patient portal system

40%
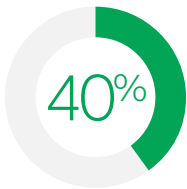
Patients who are unsure if their primary care physician has a patient portal system

Emails

According to Catalyst Healthcare Research, 93 percent of patients are likely to select a physician who offers communication via e-mail. Patients are also more willing to engage with provider email communication. According to a MailChimp survey, healthcare industry email open rates average 21.7%, which is well above other industries.

Social Media

Social media enables healthcare providers to share information, whether it be to promote health behaviors or and educate and interact with patients and colleagues. To drive patient engagement, it is important to routinely post educational content. As with email campaigns, healthcare providers should ensure that all social media content is HIPAA compliant.

Text Messages

A Healthy TXT survey found that patients prefer appointment reminders coming to their smartphones via text. Texting allows the patients to access information instantaneously without having to log in and access their patient portal. To successfully leverage text messaging, set up an automated text message tool to send patients pre-scripted messages with patient reminders related to their upcoming appointments.

4. Leverage an Educational Patient Portal

Did you know that patients forget up to 80% of information from their doctor immediately after they leave their appointments? According to American Medical Informatics Association, patient portals are a great tool to engage patients, increase patient self-efficacy, and improve the quality of care.

A patient portal is a supplemental tool to be used in conjunction with your EHR. This platform enables patients to dedicate more time to learning about their condition, treatment options, medications, and available support groups.

Although 90% of healthcare organizations offer patient portal access, only 30% of patients actively use the portal, meaning over half of patients do not have access to their own medical information. Furthermore, nearly 40 percent of patients are unsure if their primary care physician has a patient portal system.

To improve the disparity between patient portal access and patient digital health literacy, it is important to offer the patient portal in a mobile-optimized interface, provide more personalized content for patients, and educate patients on how to fully utilize the platform to drive patient adherence and compliance.

A good Patient Portal should contain the following five features:

- Customizable, HIPAA-compliant patient program
- Automation of redundant or repeatable tasks
- Easy, streamlined communication with patients
- Integration with EMR/HER
- Analytics and tracking of program efficacy

The patient portal should also enable patients to:

- Schedule appointments online
- View health information
- View bills and make payments
- Check prescription refills and requests
- Fill out intake forms
- Send messages to healthcare provider
- Update medical history
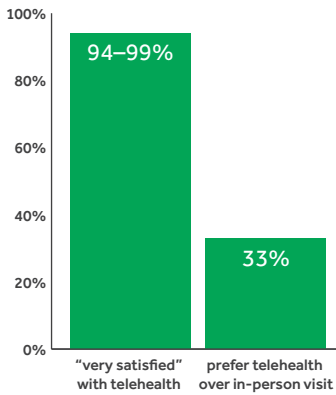
With the help of a care management platform, you can fill in gaps in patient care, improve the quality of care patients receive, and prevent admissions or readmissions to reduce total costs of care.

5. Introduce Telehealth

In a world where 25% of Americans do not have primary healthcare providers, telehealth technologies help improve access to care and encourage patients to be more engaged with their care. According to one study, between 94 and 99% of patients reported being "very satisfied" with all telehealth attributes and one-third preferred a telehealth visit to a traditional in-person visit.

In the wake of COVID-19, healthcare providers should explore new tools to communicate with patients more regularly. Telehealth facilities enable patients to access virtual consultations via video conferencing, telephone, or live chat. It is an excellent tool for participatory healthcare and can help providers provide proactive rather than reactive care.

How SCALE Marketing Can Help You Improve Your Patient Engagement Strategy

Scale Marketing provides the specialized strategic, creative, and technical expertise and resources to help healthcare provider platforms improve their patient engagement strategy. Our unbiased suite of marketing solutions was developed in response to the prevailing gap in strategic marketing services in the industry.

We follow a standardized analysis to qualify and measure all areas of your brand and patient lifecycle, from market awareness to patient acquisition, to retention and lifetime value. Regardless of whether you engage us for consulting or fully managed services, we offer the same level of dedication, transparency, and execution support to help your business succeed.

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Let's Continue the Conversation

SCALE prides itself in developing customized solutions for its clients and helping healthcare organizations grow and thrive in a challenging marketplace. Now, we are ready to help you. We look forward to sharing examples of how we have helped our clients and invite you to schedule a 1-on-1 complimentary practice management consultation with us.

Contact Cedric Tuck-Sherman at ctucksherman@scale-healthcare.com, or +1 (310) 648-0096 to continue the conversation.