

**EXECUTIVE INSIGHTS**

**RESILIENCY + RECOVERY**



## **BUILDING PATIENT LOYALTY WITH EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES**

Delivering a frictionless health care journey

# BUILDING PATIENT LOYALTY WITH EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Delivering a frictionless health care journey



**Consumer expectations have risen dramatically for a frictionless health care journey.** The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the need for effective digital patient-engagement strategies to manage communication and provide a personalized, intuitive and secure care experience at all touch points and interactions. Hospitals and health systems are using marketing tools and analytics to advance both patient engagement and outcomes.

## KEY FINDINGS

- 1** Improving digital patient engagement is a top priority for hospitals and health systems. **Competition from disrupters'** rapidly expanding their presence in health care is raising patient engagement to executive leaders and board-level strategic initiatives.
- 2** **By increasing patient engagement,** hospitals improve the patient experience.
- 3** Good retention practices focus on patients throughout their care journey with a **combination of digital and in-person communications.** Navigators can teach patients how to use digital self-service tools such as eCheck-in to streamline clinic wait times and use telehealth services.
- 4** Using **marketing segmentation and differentiation,** hospitals and health systems are targeting their messages to connect with patients throughout their journey and conducting campaigns to improve access to care for vulnerable communities.
- 5** **Data analytics** can predict who will need future care and identify service-line messaging for engagement.

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**MODERATOR** (*Suzanna Hoppszallern, American Hospital Association*): **On your organization's priority list, where does improving patient engagement fall? What external drivers and internal goals are raising patient engagement to a board-level priority?**

**BRUCE GREENSTEIN** (*LHC Group*): We're a post-acute care provider that partners with more than 400 hospitals around the country. We have a slightly different view of patient engagement, because we're always thinking about how we brand ourselves under the hospital's banner. We follow our patients on behalf of the hospital all the way through their home health episode. We also maintain a relationship to ensure a connection and we try to minimize readmissions by having open lines of communication. After discharge, we want them to have a great experience.

**HEATHER MONACKY** (*WakeMed*): Patient access and engagement is an extremely important initiative for our organization. This board-level commitment is demonstrated by the fact that they have invested in a leadership-level role to focus exclusively on making sure each patient's journey from first contact to discharge and beyond makes patient access a true priority.

Right now, we, along with every other health care organization in the country, are experiencing difficult staffing issues. If we're able to better utilize the electronic engagement tools available to us, we'll be able to better utilize our teams as well.

**JULIE WASHINGTON** (*Trinity Health*): As CMO and CXO, I'm responsible for our brand, what we say about ourselves internally and externally, and the experience we deliver. Member experience is one of the nine priorities for the organization, so it's a focus area for everyone. We also tie experience to safety — one of our six core values. Safety is an im-

portant part of an experience; you can't say that you had a good experience but didn't feel safe. Member experience receives complete attention by our executive team on a weekly basis, and by our board on a quarterly basis.

**MODERATOR**: **What is your patient-acquisition strategy? What are you doing to level the playing field to address consumer-friendly offerings from nonhospital competitors?**

**"Most of the competition that is coming into our market is nontraditional — competitors that are able to deliver a digital patient experience quicker and easier for people and patients."**

— Sean O'Neil —  
Exeter Hospital

**SEAN O'NEIL** (*Exeter Hospital*): We're focused on the digital aspect of patient engagement and how we can actively engage our patients more digitally to build brand loyalty. Most of the competition that is coming into our market is nontraditional — competitors that are able to deliver a digital patient experience quicker and easier for people and patients.

COVID-19 has slowed us down a bit in the last 12 to 16 months, but we continue to meet to bring in different technologies using various ways of engaging and locking in our patients.

**MICHELLE LALUMIA** (*Mercury Healthcare*): Sean, if you are trying to engage with someone who isn't yet a patient, how do you want them to think of you? Why would they think of you first rather than going somewhere else? Let's say it is a level playing field, their only advantage is that they know how to engage patients in a consumer-centric way. Who are these competitors and what do they do so well?

**O'NEIL**: We have a big primary care base, but you can't walk into one of our offices and expect to be seen immediately. When express care types of clinics entered our market, we lost a lot of primary care visits. They would just go elsewhere for immediate care, and then come back to our primary care docs for their chronic illnesses.

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Now, digital offerings allow patients to see their providers right away. We can't really do it in person yet. What competitors are offering is easier access. Ten years ago, a nurse would come out and say, 'The doctor will see you now.' Not anymore. The patients will see you when they want to, how they want to and decide how much they're going to pay.

There aren't many new people moving into our community. To grow our base, we have to take them from somewhere else. We're trying to ensure that we are really consumer-driven.

Our competition is not the hospital systems anymore. While there are other hospital systems in our market, our competition is from other disruptors. They don't have to build brick-and-mortar facilities anymore to come into our market. Walmart and Amazon are doing this. We have to provide better access, or at least comparable to what they're doing, and then rely on relationships we have built over time with our physicians. Physicians are retiring earlier now, and when you lose a physician who had treated 4,000 or 5,000 covered lives in their office, it's hard to keep those patients in your system without having a competitive offering.

**MONACKEY:** We are in a competitive market, and we have adopted relatively simplistic but sometimes difficult-to-execute strategies to support patient access. These strategies include making it easier for patients to enter into the system by removing the barriers, making sure we answer our phones, having easy-to-use online scheduling and ensuring our operational decisions support frictionless patient access at every level.

We are expanding our walk-in primary care facilities across our primary service area. By the end of 2022, there will be at least 12 locations. They are staffed

by providers with a completely open schedule. It's open access that is convenient and accessible for patients when and where they need it — 365 days a year. This, combined with our urgent care and traditional primary care locations, will help ensure that we remain the leading provider of health care for the community we serve.

“With segmentation, not only can you look at patients but also consumers and reliably predict who is going to need a certain service 12 months out. We can pinpoint these things.”

— Michelle Lalumia —  
Mercury Healthcare

**JOHN GAEDE** (*Sky Lakes Medical Center*):

The fact that I can live in Klamath Falls and see a physician just about anywhere is a game changer. When I look at the landscape, I think of it from a threat perspective. Walmart has selected Epic as its electronic health record (EHR), so no matter where I go in the country, my health record will be available. Another potential competitor is Dollar General, which has about 17,000 locations across the country, including rural areas. We have three in our area and once they start providing health

care, that's going to change the landscape. As an organization, we're a sole provider, but the market has changed.

**MODERATOR:** What steps have you taken to connect with patients on their health journeys and how are you making it easier for them to engage with you?

**JOHN HENDERSON** (*Children's Hospital of Orange County*):

Our overarching strategy is to create a web experience and a mobile experience that allows any of our patients or potential patients to come through a unified digital front door, where they are able to consume information or services. We're focused on how we bring that to life.

On the inpatient side, our customer service patient-engagement team does a lot of real-time rounding, so they can perform service recovery if we run into any issues. That's going well; the feed-

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back from parents has been positive.

**NANCY HILL** (*Midland Memorial Hospital*): In addition to the tech aspect, we also have a human aspect. It's hospitality, but it's also a liaison with the clinical team. We have four patient advocates, a director and manager of the patient experience department. Their job is to reach out to patients while they're in house, to be available for calls, to be available to connect a patient or a family member with a provider and to explain things.

**MODERATOR:** What technologies, data and analytics do you use to understand your patients and consumers, predict their health care needs and engage them?

**WASHINGTON:** We use segmentation and marketing tools as a feeder to obtain leads for new patients and then, ultimately, to retain them. We use segmentation studies to find people who may have a greater probability of needing a specific service of care.

Of course, we're building our influencer base. A big part in the social fabric of marketing is how others can give voice to your brand and purpose, without it being a huge cost.

We use marketing to help us with messaging and differentiation. What do you stand for? How are you different from others? It's like hotels: You see a lot of them on the same street, but why did you turn into one and pass all the others? Knowing that answer is important to us.

When we talk about consumer engagement and stickiness, it's connected to the causes we champion and our commitment to mission. We launched a

program in March 2021 called "It Starts Here." The focus was on how we bring the knowledge, education and actual information to the local community. We targeted vulnerable communities, not just Black and Hispanic communities, but those who might be left out or forgotten and could not access care related to COVID-19.

"Another potential competitor is Dollar General, which has about 17,000 locations across the country, including rural areas. We have three in our area and once they start providing health care, that's going to change the landscape."

— John Gaede —  
Sky Lakes Medical Center

**LALUMIA:** I was glad to hear you talk about segmentation strategies, Julie. With segmentation, not only can you look at patients but also consumers and reliably predict who is going to need a certain service 12 months out. We can pinpoint these things.

In the future, we won't talk about data-driven decisions. It's a given that every decision is backed by data because there's just so much of it, and there are ways to make it actionable. Companies like Starbucks attract consumers because they know and expect a standard experience. It's always going to meet their expectations. Starbucks doesn't even have to survey anymore because they do it so well. The end

game is delivering an expected, standard experience. That's going to matter in health care. That's what's required to match what disruptors are offering.

How often have you experienced the retail message, 'Hey, you left this item in your shopping cart?' There's going to be an equivalent experience in health care. When browsing on the web, you'll be asked, 'Are you interested in an appointment? Did you find what you were looking for?' That's consumer experience and engagement — maybe not today, but soon.



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