



# PATIENT CONSUMERISM AND YOUR PRACTICE

How This Changes Things

**hub**

by  HENRY SCHEIN®

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## INTRODUCTION

Patient attitudes have been shifting toward a more active, consumer-driven approach for several years now. As a result of this shift, practices have had to make changes in how they interact with their patients, centering more on the patient's needs and preferences than ever before. While this should have positive outcomes overall, the undertaking itself can feel overwhelming when just getting started.

In this eBook, we will explore patient consumerism and what it means for the average practice. We'll start by defining patient consumerism and exploring its causes and effects. We'll then look at the shifts your practice should make in light of consumerism, before finishing with an overview of the tools you should implement in your practice for various points in the patient journey. When we've finished, you should understand how patient consumerism is likely to affect your practice and what you can do to succeed in this environment. Let's get started.

### WHAT IS PATIENT CONSUMERISM?

Patient consumerism refers to the responsibility and individual choice patients now have in managing and paying for their healthcare. As today's patients are responsible for more of their care costs than ever before, patient consumerism acknowledges the role patients play as purchasers and managers of their own care.

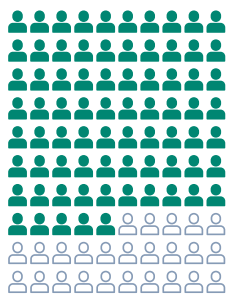
Additionally, patient consumerism refers to a higher level of patient involvement in their own healthcare decisions. Gone are the days of patients passively following doctors' orders with little to no input. Consumerist patients are empowered, active rather than passive, and desire transparency and choice as they partner with their providers and engage in their care process.





## WHAT HAS CAUSED PATIENT CONSUMERISM?

There have been many contributing factors to the rise of patient consumerism. Rising healthcare costs, higher premiums, and high deductible healthcare plans have placed a greater financial burden on patients than in the past. An SPH Analytics study showed that patients with deductibles of \$1,000 or more rose from 10% in 2006 to 41% in 2014. These patients, now facing responsibility for their care costs, want value. This has driven patients to approach healthcare much the same way they do any other good or service they will be purchasing. This creates more informed patients who are searching for providers using search engines and rating sites, making patient satisfaction a greater priority for practices than previously.



# 75%

of patients see healthcare decisions as the most important and expensive they make.

## WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF PATIENT CONSUMERISM?

As a result of patient consumerism, the way in which patients interact with their providers has changed. Patients now desire more transparency from their healthcare providers. 75% of patients see healthcare decisions as the most important and expensive they make. This view necessitates price transparency, along with strong communication between provider and patient in general to create understanding of health status and treatment plan rationale.

Patients also want their needs to be addressed. Now that they are responsible for more of the healthcare cost, they expect a more personally focused experience. They want convenience, efficient access to their care, and a partnership with their provider. These consumer-driven patients are engaging in their healthcare more than ever, and while this certainly changes things, it is ultimately best for outcomes.



## WHAT SHIFTS DOES YOUR PRACTICE NEED TO MAKE IN LIGHT OF CONSUMERISM?

Patient consumerism requires a more patient-centered approach to care and personalization. Practices must create a positive patient experience. This starts with implementing strategies that streamline the patients' journey, such as price transparency, online scheduling and patient intake, digital bill pay, and payment plans. Ideally, your practice should begin by knowing your current and prospective patients and understanding their needs, behaviors, wants and motivating factors, and working to fulfill those items. Focus on affordability, access, and positive experience.

**"Practices must create a positive patient experience".**

## WHAT TOOLS SHOULD YOU IMPLEMENT IN YOUR PRACTICE?

It's understandable that the changing dynamics in light of patient consumerism can seem daunting, but thankfully there are several solutions that can be utilized to create exactly the experience your patients are looking for, at all stages of the patient journey.

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### PRE-VISIT

The patient's experience begins before they even set foot in your practice, at the moment when they decide to schedule an appointment. Today's consumerist patients will often begin by searching online to find a provider that appears to fit their needs. With this in mind, practice marketing and reputation management is one of the first areas where investing in solutions is wise. It's important to put your practice's best face forward and showcase what your practice is all about, giving prospective patients a clear idea of what to expect from your organization.



Next, allow patients to quickly and conveniently schedule appointments that fit into their schedule with online scheduling. A bonus here is that it eliminates the need for phone calls with lengthy hold times, which is not only a plus for your patients but your staff as well. Once those appointments have been scheduled, utilize two-way texting and appointment reminders to communicate with your patients in a way that they can easily respond to. These solutions can be used to confirm appointments to avoid empty time slots, as well as communicate delays in the schedule to your patients so that they feel their time is being respected.



Finally, improve wait times and workflow by using digital check-in over the traditional clipboard full of forms in the waiting room. This allows patients to complete their intake forms on their time, when they feel less rushed, giving the provider more accurate information, and eliminating the need for practice staff to scan or perform data entry as the information is directly imported to your Electronic Health Records (EHR).



### VISIT

When it comes to the actual visit, telehealth and Remote Patient Monitoring (RPM) are among the most vital solutions for today's patients. Remember, convenience is a priority, so allowing your patients the opportunity to utilize telehealth when possible will greatly increase satisfaction. Similarly RPM will enable more seamless and thorough care for chronically ill patients, an improvement that will be enjoyed by patients and providers alike.



A seamless, easy-to-use EHR is another necessary solution. This will enable providers to keep their attention on the patient, rather than focusing on documentation. And finally, consider investing in clinical decision support to improve diagnostic accuracy, decrease complications, and educate and engage patients in their care process.



### POST-VISIT

The patient's journey doesn't end when their visit does. There are a couple additional solutions that will make for a strong finish to the patient's experience. First is mobile payments. There are many reasons patients can be slow to pay their medical bills and financial struggles are only one of them. Convenience plays a huge role here, as today's patients are used to being able to pay a bill through their phone. With mobile pay, up to 40% of patient payments are received within 24 hours of the first notification. So, give them a convenient way to pay their bills and increase your practice's revenue at the same time with mobile payments.



## CONCLUSION

While it's true that patient consumerism is prompting sweeping changes across the healthcare industry, it's also true that it's giving providers something they've always wanted – more engaged patients. Adjusting the way things have previously been done can feel overwhelming, but with the right solutions in place, you'll be delighting your patients and seeing benefits for your practice in no time!



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