The Modern Practice's Guide to the
Patient Experience

hub
by HENRY SCHEIN®

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Introduction

The topic of patient experience has been getting a lot of attention recently. Across the healthcare industry, stakeholders are analyzing the patient experience in their organization and brainstorming ways to improve this process. There's good reason for this focus, as the modern patient is particularly consumer-driven and places an emphasis on a positive experience.

We're here to help your practice understand the patient experience and how it affects your business. We'll start by defining the patient experience and exploring why it's important. From there we'll discuss how the patient experience can affect revenue and how you can improve the patient experience in your practice, before finishing up with a more in-depth look at why you should focus on this process.

Let's get started.

What is the patient experience?

Why is the patient experience important?

How can the patient experience affect revenue?

How can you improve the patient experience in your practice?

Why should you focus on the patient experience?

Conclusion

WHILE PATIENT EXPERIENCE IS OBJECTIVE, PATIENT SATISFACTION IS SUBJECTIVE.

What is the patient experience?

The patient experience is made up of all the interactions a patient has with the healthcare system, including their care team, practices, hospitals, and insurers. Appointment scheduling, communication, and information access are all included in this process. While the term patient satisfaction is often used interchangeably with patient experience, the two terms are in fact different.

While patient experience refers to the events that should happen over the course of the patient's care journey, patient satisfaction refers to the patient's expectations and if they were met. While patient experience is objective, patient satisfaction is subjective.

The University of Utah details five elements of the patient experience that do a nice job of summarizing how practices should approach this process. Those elements are:
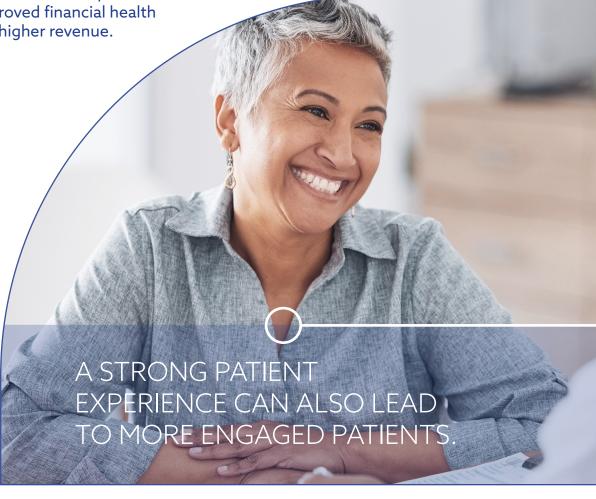
• Knowing and caring for the patient

• Listening to and hearing the patient

• Teaching and explaining to the patient

• Using teamwork to coordinate for the patient

• Providing efficiency to make care easy for the patient

These should be the goals practices use to motivate how they approach every step of the patient experience. In so doing, they will create not only an acceptable patient experience, but also greater patient satisfaction.

Why is the patient experience important?

Improving the patient experience is beneficial not only to patients, but to practices as well, creating better clinical and business outcomes. This is true largely because today's consumer-driven patients are more likely to choose providers based not only on health outcomes, but also their experience at the practice. When patients have a thorough, positive experience, they remain loyal to that care provider and tell others about the practice, which in turn further enhances its reputation. This can all lead to improved financial health for the practice due to higher revenue.

A strong patient experience can also lead to more engaged patients. Patients who feel supported and valued take a more active role in their care and are also typically more compliant with regard to treatment plans. This, in turn, leads to better health outcomes, which is the ultimate goal of healthcare overall.

A STRONG PATIENT EXPERIENCE CAN ALSO LEAD TO MORE ENGAGED PATIENTS.

How can the patient experience affect revenue?

Consumer-driven patients expect a level of customer service in addition to care. With this in mind, providing a strong patient experience is likely to increase your practice's revenue through patient retention and a better reputation.

In fact, **U.S. hospitals that provide a "superior" experience had profit margins averaging 50% greater than those who were rated as providing an "average" experience.** This makes perfect sense when you consider the cost of healthcare in the United States each year. According to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, **patients spend more than $10,000 per year on average on healthcare** costs, meaning that losing patients can mean a big hit to revenue, while retaining and even attracting new patients can create greater financial stability.

Additionally, prioritizing the patient experience doesn't only benefit patients, but staff as well. Employee satisfaction and retention both often increase with a focus on patient experience, reducing turnover costs. This, too, improves revenue.

CONSUMER-DRIVEN PATIENTS EXPECT A LEVEL OF CUSTOMER SERVICE IN ADDITION TO CARE.

How can you improve the patient experience in your practice?

With the importance of the patient experience and its potential effect on your practice, improving this process can have a great positive impact on your business. Overall, the goal is to streamline your workflow to make the patient's experience as efficient as possible with little waiting and minimal delays.

When interacting with patients, focus on empathy and strong communication. Apologize for delays and demonstrate an unrushed demeanor during encounters. Actively listen to your patient as they explain their concerns and never interrupt them before they've finished. Give expectations of a timeline for care, but always overestimate. It's much better to under-promise and over-deliver whenever possible.

Be clear with care instructions and check for the patient's understanding. Don't underestimate the importance of patient education. The better your patient understands their condition and the purpose behind their treatment, the more likely they are to adhere to your instructions.

Aside from these more relational ways to improve the patient experience, implement solutions that will create a more convenient experience for your patients wherever possible. Start by making sure your online presence is accurate and helpful for patients, both current and prospective. This includes your website, any social media accounts, and your presence on review sites. When patients are trying to find care, they should be able to easily determine if your practice is a good fit for them.

Make scheduling as easy as possible by implementing online scheduling and sending appointment confirmations to help busy patients remember their appointments. Use digital intake so patients can complete paperwork in advance, providing the most accurate information. And after the appointment, distribute surveys and act on the insights they provide so that you can continue to improve based on actual patient feedback.

In summary, focus on these five areas to improve the patient experience:

1. Streamline your practice workflow.

2. Focus on strong communication with your patients.

3. Make patient education a priority.

4. Invest in a strong, user-friendly online presence.

5. Implement digital solutions for tasks such as scheduling and intake.

Why should you focus on the patient experience?

As we mentioned previously, the patient experience has the ability to impact your practice's revenue, which obviously demonstrates its importance. Outside of that reasoning, though, the reality is that focusing on the patient experience is necessary because it's important to patients. According to the Beryl Institute, 96% of patients count the patient experience as either important or very important when they are selecting a provider.

A **2018 report from Press Ganey showed that patients are five times more likely to choose a practice that provided a positive ex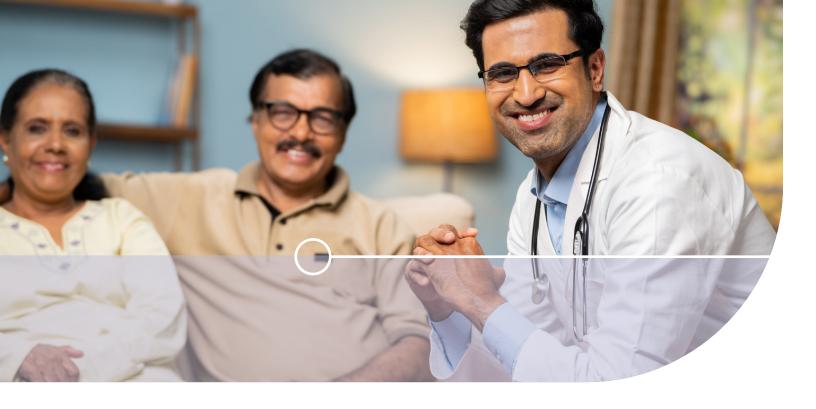perience over a practice with strong marketing**. So, while marketing is arguably important to bring patients in, delivering on a solid patient experience is necessary to making them stick with you.

When it comes to what patients will focus on when telling others about their providers, patient experience wins out over care quality. According to Vanguard Communications, **96% of patient complaints that are posted online refer to experience over quality**. This is particularly important as **90% of patients check online review sites before scheduling their doctor appointments, according to a 2020 survey from Doctor.com**. No matter how you look at it, focusing on creating a pleasant and thorough patient experience in your practice is necessary to the health of your practice.

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Conclusion

If you haven't begun thinking about the patient experience in your practice and how you can improve it, the time is now. Providing quality care is important, of course, but today's patients want a convenient, streamlined experience as well.

That's why at SolutionsHub we work hard to make sure we have best-in-class solutions for your practice to partner with to implement the technology that will help create the experience your patients want, including practice marketing, online scheduling, appointment reminders, digital check-in, and more.

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