

Standing out from the crowd:

How to become the go-to destination for care in your community



Introduction

In healthcare, competition is fierce. Every organization is trying to attract and retain patients by providing excellent care, state-of-the-art services, beautiful new facilities and refreshed marketing. But standing out from the crowd is tough, especially amid the commoditization of care services fueled by retail giants like Walgreens, Amazon and Walmart. Fundamental shifts in the healthcare landscape are coming for every community, urban to rural, in the years ahead.

Health systems and medical groups need to keep up with the rise of digital health technology, e-commerce and high-deductible health plans—all of which have fundamentally changed patients' expectations about their healthcare experience. Patients now expect the same convenient, self-service tools they enjoy in other industries. Healthcare organizations that don't adapt will lose those patients to innovative, tech-savvy competitors, leaving them with more empty appointment slots and less revenue. No doubt, adopting a digital-first patient experience will prove to be a vital differentiator in this competitive environment.

This white paper explores why healthcare consumerism is on the rise and how embracing a technology-enabled patient experience can help provider groups differentiate themselves in a crowded landscape. It also outlines six ways healthcare organizations can make themselves the go-to choice for care their communities by:

- ✔ Simplifying scheduling
- ✔ Opening the lines of communication
- ✔ Digitizing registration
- ✔ Offering flexible ways to pay
- ✔ Getting patients' feedback
- ✔ Empowering staff to create positive interactions



The transition from patient to consumer: Why it matters

Today's consumer-driven healthcare environment can be traced back to three causes: increased consumer comfort with digital health technologies, the rise of e-commerce and a surge in patients' financial responsibility for their care.



Digital health technology is here to stay.

In the past decade, patients have eagerly embraced new mobile apps, wearable devices and online health services that give them the ability to take a more active role in their health. Almost 90% of Americans own a smartphone,¹ and using it to manage their health is just as commonplace as shopping, banking or text messaging.²

The retail industry already understands this shift: In 2021, 79% of retailers said they agree that they will be able to adapt quickly as consumers' preferences change, yet healthcare still lags retail's innovation.³ In fact, 53% of healthcare organizations spend less than 10% of their budget on technology—an underinvestment that limits patients from getting the digital experience they want and expect.⁴



E-commerce transformed consumer expectations.

The ubiquity of shopping online, ordering a car ride to the airport and getting dinner delivered from anywhere has changed the way people manage their daily lives. In fact, the early days of the pandemic compressed 10 years' worth of digital transformation into just three months.⁵

The expectation for fast, convenient service doesn't stop when someone visits their provider's office. Patients want the same digital tools in healthcare that they use in other consumer-facing industries. A 2022 PwC survey examining shifting consumer behavior found that patients' top three "must-haves" all center around convenience and digital tools. Surveyed patients cited co-located appointments and labs, consolidated and digitized health information, and price-comparison tools as necessary features—yet not all healthcare organizations acknowledge the weight of their importance.⁶

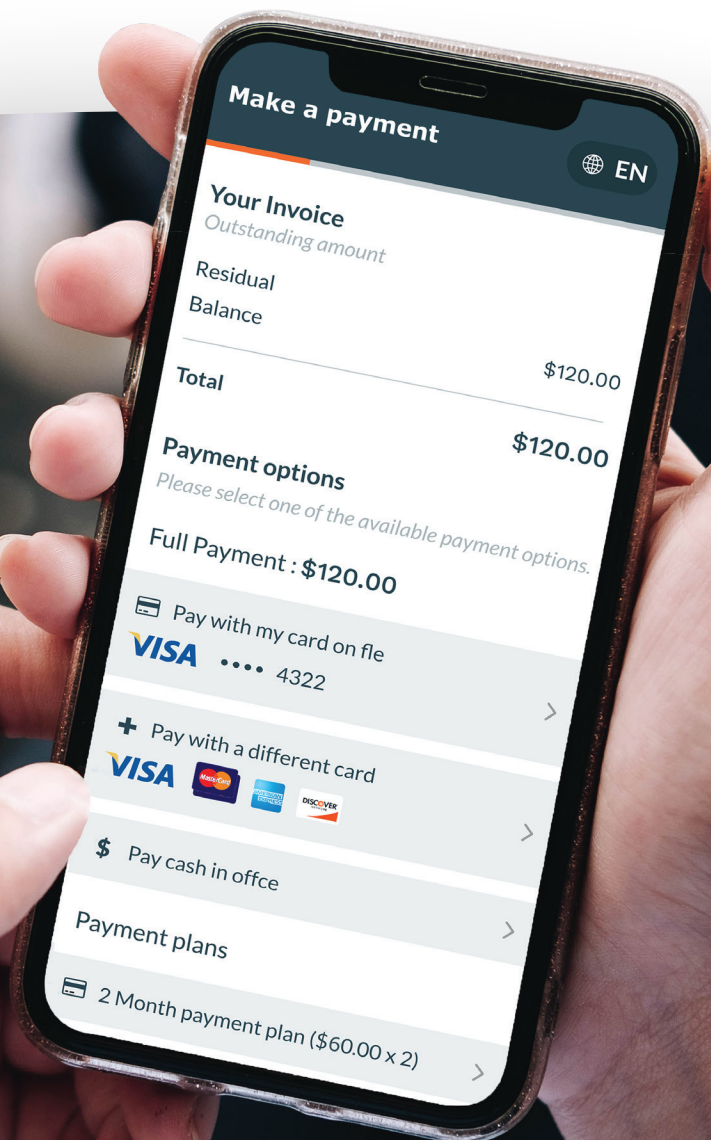
Ignoring patients' expectations for convenience will make patient acquisition and retention harder than ever, especially as patients shoulder a higher share of the cost of their care.



High-deductible health plans are changing patients' financial responsibility.

High-deductible health plans (HDHPs) are major contributors to the rise of healthcare consumerism. As recently as 2021, more than half (55.7%) of U.S. employees with employer-sponsored health insurance were enrolled in HDHPs⁷, up from 39.4% just six years prior.⁸ While HDHPs have lower upfront costs, they also put patients at risk of being unable to pay their bill in full.

But given U.S. consumers' increased comfort in making digital payments—82% of them did so in 2021⁹—healthcare organizations can improve their odds of getting paid in full by offering flexible payment options at the time of service. In a recent Phreesia survey, more than half of respondents (56%) said they want their provider to offer one or more digital payment features, such as payment plans, automatic payments or the ability to keep a credit card on file. What's more, they're willing to change doctors for it: 18% of surveyed patients said they would consider switching providers for the ability to pay their medical bills online.¹⁰



Patient experience: The key to differentiation

For healthcare organizations looking to stay competitive, patient acquisition is crucial. Attracting new patients gives provider groups the revenue they need to keep the lights on, launch new service lines and meet their revenue targets.

But that doesn't mean healthcare leaders should forget about patient retention. After all, it costs far less to keep an existing customer than to acquire a new one.¹¹ That's why healthcare organizations must prioritize patient retention as an ongoing part of their business strategy.

Consider the following strategies to differentiate your organization:

- 1 Simplify scheduling
- 2 Open the lines of communication
- 3 Digitize registration
- 4 Offer flexible ways to pay
- 5 Get patients' feedback
- 6 Empower staff to create positive interactions

1 Simplify scheduling

For patients, the process of booking and confirming medical appointments is often a major hurdle to getting the care they need. They spend far too long on the phone—more than 8 minutes, on average¹²—which may make them feel like their time is being wasted.

Digital scheduling tools can help healthcare organizations meet patients' expectations. Solutions like end-to-end scheduling automation help provider groups backfill cancellations and get patients in for care sooner, which keeps appointment slots full. Better yet, tools like online appointment requests and digital appointment reminders help strengthen access, which is a strong selling point for most patients. In fact, among all the reasons for selecting a provider, 71% of Accenture survey respondents cited access as their deciding factor.¹³

Giving patients the scheduling experience they want helps healthcare organizations stand out, particularly in comparison to groups that mandate patients call to schedule a visit. Better yet, patients are more likely to show up for their appointments when they have digital tools to manage them—and less likely to delay important care.¹⁴ That means fewer no-shows, which helps providers realize revenue they might otherwise have missed due to an empty appointment slot.

Keeping patients off the phone—and scheduling their appointments online instead—demonstrates that your organization prioritizes convenience, helping you stand out from the crowd and improve patient loyalty.



2 Open the lines of communication

Just as patients want to fully understand their diagnosis and treatment options, they also want clear, timely communication from their providers. By leveraging the channels that patients already know and use, such as text messaging and email, healthcare organizations can reliably engage patients at the right time and place, all without creating extra work for staff.

Indeed, digital communication is a win-win. Among patients surveyed by Phreesia, 88% said they enjoy using digital messaging to communicate with their providers, and 41% said the ability to do so is a “must-have.” Yet less than one-third of patients (31%) said they had used online tools to communicate with their doctor in the past year.¹⁰ That disconnect presents an opportunity for healthcare providers to ramp up their digital communications and better engage with patients.

It also gives providers the ability to generate more appointments from existing patients. With digital messaging, healthcare organizations can easily recall patients for routine care or gauge their interest in higher-value services and elective procedures. They also can increase brand recognition and patient loyalty, which helps minimize the odds that patients will look elsewhere for care. The end results are better engagement, more revenue opportunities and a higher-quality experience for patients.



Communicating with patients using familiar methods like text messages and email will set your organization apart from others that require special apps or logins.





3 Digitize registration

More than 3 in 5 patients prefer checking in online,¹⁰ but most healthcare organizations still require patients to stop by the front desk to complete their pre-visit tasks. Knowing that patients' priorities skew toward convenience and personalization, healthcare organizations that digitize check-in can demonstrate their commitment to modernizing the patient experience.

With digital check-in software, healthcare organizations can give patients the ability to complete pre-visit registration anytime, anywhere—at home, on the go or in the office. Digital check-in also is far more inclusive than paper-and-pencil check-in, as many third-party solutions offer multi-language capabilities that let patients complete registration in their language of preference. And by embedding social needs screenings within digital registration, patients can answer sensitive questions about their access to food, shelter and more, all from the privacy and security of their own device.

Digital check-in gives patients the experience they want and need, helping healthcare organizations differentiate themselves from the competition.



4 Offer flexible ways to pay

As out-of-pocket costs rise, flexible payment options have become a key driver of patient retention and satisfaction. More than three-quarters of patients say they want their providers to offer more digital payment modalities—and nearly 60% view their providers more favorably when a contactless payment device is made available at the point of service.¹⁵

Giving patients the option to pay online aligns with how they want to make medical payments. It also gives provider groups the opportunity to collect more copays and balances at the time of service. Pre-visit and point-of-service payment options like Google Pay™ and Apple Pay®, as well as traditional payment methods, are vital differentiator.

Self-service payment plans have an outsized impact on the patient experience, allowing patients to pay what they can, when they can, rather than dreading their medical bills or avoiding paying them outright. For healthcare organizations, that translates to less bad debt, more consistent revenue and fewer awkward financial conversations between staff and patients.



Providing patients options about how and when to pay their responsibility is a win-win: they get the financial experience they expect, and your organization strengthens its bottom line.

5 Get patients' feedback

Post-visit surveys allow healthcare organizations to receive honest, real-time feedback directly from patients about their care experience. Provider groups can use those survey results to fine-tune the patient experience, and in turn, bolster retention. If multiple patients raise the same concern, for example, or if customer service quality is consistently given a low rating, it's time to make changes to resolve those issues.

To meet patients' expectations for their care, it's essential to amplify their voices. By using surveys to assess patients' needs—and using that data to inform operational improvements—healthcare organizations can improve patient loyalty. Digital survey tools also can be used to prompt satisfied patients to leave an online review, helping practices improve their reputation and attract new patients.

Happy patients leave good online reviews, which are a growing way for patients to find and choose their healthcare providers.



6 Empower staff to create positive interactions

Front-office staff always strive to ensure that patients feel respected and welcomed. But when those staff are bogged down with manual work, it's difficult for them to also serve as the welcoming face of the organization.

By automating repetitive tasks like check-in and appointment reminders, staff members' time and energy can be freed up to provide the personal attention patients need and expect. When patients feel heard, they're likely to keep coming back—and that loyalty can be key to improving an organization's reputation and revenue.

What's more, staff can use their newfound free time to help patients who need more support using technology to manage their care.¹⁰ When staff have fewer phone calls and manual data-entry tasks to handle, they can use that time to focus on giving patients the best possible experience.

Giving staff more time to spend with patients will build your reputation as a healthcare organization that cares about personalizing the patient experience.



Conclusion

As the healthcare industry shifts toward a more patient-centric framework, provider groups that hope to compete need to give patients the modern, convenient experience they expect. Investing now in digital tools will set up your organization for long-term success. By embracing tools like self-service registration, digital payments, text messaging, email communication and patient surveys—and by automating manual work to give staff more time to focus on patients—you can position your organization to become the go-to source for care in your community.

Phreesia's digital tools help healthcare organizations maximize efficiency, increase revenue and stand out from the crowd.

Learn more at
phreesia.com

About Phreesia

Phreesia is a trusted leader in patient activation, giving providers, health plans, life sciences companies and other organizations the tools to help patients take a more active role in their care. Founded in 2005, Phreesia enabled more than 120 million patient visits in 2022 – more than 1 in 10 visits across the U.S. – scale that we believe allows us to make meaningful impact. Offering patient-driven digital solutions for intake, outreach, education and more, Phreesia enhances the patient experience, drives efficiency and improves healthcare outcomes.

End notes

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