

Creating Connections for Patient Engagement

The Role of Interactive, Interoperable Patient Engagement Systems in Building Relationships for More Responsive Healthcare in a Changing Environment

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Introduction

Healthcare is nearly as much about relationships as it is about medicine. Relationships among patients, clinicians, staff and administrators all affect the delivery of care, the patient's experience of care, and the outcomes of that care. Healthcare is a journey of a thousand touch points and data points from finding a provider to refilling a prescription—each one with the potential to enhance or derail the patient's experience.

It's no wonder that KLAS Research called patient engagement "one of the most complex and overwhelming areas of healthcare IT" and outlined 80 different functions in the patient engagement framework along three pillars: access, partnership and navigation.

"Patient experience is the sum of all the interactions" between caregivers and patients, says Dwight McBee, chief experience officer for Temple Health, a major academic medical center in Philadelphia. "Our goal is to be a real partner with our patients as we work together to achieve their optimum wellness."

The first step in that partnership is patient engagement.

Patient Engagement is Not Optional

Patient (and family) engagement has become an essential ingredient to health care for a number of reasons:

- **Quality of care.** Time and again, studies show that patients who are active partners in their care achieve better outcomes.
- **Clinician shortages.** More than one million nurses and nearly one third of doctors are expected to retire by 2033, making it essential to find new ways to extend the reach of healthcare professionals.
- **Increasingly diverse populations.** By 2033, Americans under age 40 will be "majority minority," with more people identifying as Hispanic, Black, Asian, or multiracial. Despite efforts to recruit and train an equally diverse healthcare workforce, it's unlikely that supply will meet demand: yet another reason that it's urgent to find ways to extend that workforce.
- **Money.** Reimbursement now hinges on scores from the Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) surveys. Increasingly consumers consult online sources such as Yelp, social networks, and the government sponsored HospitalCompare.gov Star ratings before they pick a provider. Patient satisfaction is more than nice-to-have, it's must-have.

A Tangle of Touchpoints

Any open dialogue between healthcare providers and their patients and communities will reveal hidden needs and barriers to care. Most hospitals and health systems have several different initiatives—and corresponding apps and technology solutions—to try to address these barriers and build relationships with patients. This may include appointment reminders, patient portals, HIPAA compliant physician communication, wayfinding, patient education, and feedback loops. The typical hospital may have 10-15 or even more different technology approaches to patient engagement.

Add in efforts to address patient safety and overall quality of care—both closely tied with patient engagement—and you’ve got a tangled web of initiatives and platforms that itself can become a barrier to care. The risk of “portalitis” is real, as patients and providers try to figure out which tool to use when.

The Interactive Patient System: Centralize and simplify

Leading providers are finding a solution to this confusion right in each patient’s room: the same TV that the patients use to watch the ball game.

The latest interactive patient systems (IPS) are so much more than television. They can improve patient comfort, provide insights into the patient experience and allow more responsive patient care. They connect with electronic health record systems to deliver tailored patient education to the bedside—and document that the patient has seen and understood those messages. They deliver therapeutic music and relaxation exercises to manage stress and stimulate healing. They give patients an easy mechanism for feedback and staff a way to respond in real time. And, they can connect with patient engagement applications leveraged before and after the inpatient stay to support continuity of care and collaboration across the continuum.

With more than \$8.25 billion spent each year on preventable readmissions, hospitals are focused on ensuring patients understand and can manage their conditions after discharge. The IPS can deliver that essential education while patients are still in the hospital and can easily query their care team with any concerns, helping ensure better outcomes. Post discharge connectivity can ensure follow through on care plans and follow-up during these transitions.

An IPS can serve as the hub of an organization’s entire patient engagement ecosystem.

Temple Health:

Tell me what you really think — right now

While the HCAHPS survey is still the benchmark for patient satisfaction, patients fill it out weeks after their stay. Dwight McBee of Temple Health wants to know how his organization is doing *now*.

Temple's IPS is part of a larger listening strategy. "We include the voice of the patient in everything we do," McBee says, not only through mail surveys but via active monitoring and quick response to patient and community concerns on social media. Temple has a total of 10 patient and family advisory councils whose membership reflects the diversity of Temple's patient populations. Temple also makes a point of getting to know patients when they are admitted to the hospital. Regular rounding by nurses and administrative staff helps build relationships and creates a direct line for patients.

Temple's IPS gives patients an easy way to reach out to the patient experience officer and nurse leaders at any time and get a speedy response. "Not only do we get entertainment and meaningful distraction through videos on demand, but we're also leveraging it to gather the voice of our patient," McBee says. Temple has moved some food service questions from the HCAHPS survey to the inpatient IPS system, streamlining the patient survey process and giving staff a chance to change the patient's experience at bedside.

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– Dwight McBee,
Temple Health

The Brooklyn Hospital Center: Engagement in many languages

In 2015, the Brooklyn Hospital Center (TBHC) made improving patient experience a strategic priority, and upgrading to an IPS was a key part of that strategy. With more than a million residents in the area surrounding its Downtown Brooklyn campus, TBHC has plenty of opportunity for growth. Yet its star ratings were lagging, leading to both eroding market share and lower reimbursement rates from Medicare and Medicaid, which account for 80 percent of its patient population. Increasing the HCAHPS score was a matter of survival in the competitive New York healthcare market.

The IPS engages patients immediately and facilitates feedback, says Leonid Gorelik, DNP, RN, who became TBHC's first CXO in 2018. Nurses introduce patients to the system when they arrive at their rooms. Therapeutic music helps put patients at ease right away. The system links with the patient's EHR and alerts them to watch recommended patient education videos, noting when they do. The hospital used to keep written materials in two languages: the IPS offers videos in four. This multilingual feature has had a huge impact, Gorelik says, especially in the maternal child health unit, where patients are required to watch several videos before discharge.

The hospital's HCAHPS scores on communication with nurses have increased by more than nine points in just 18 months. "The system helps pull together all of our patient engagement initiatives.," says Gorelik. "It enables us to actually ask folks what works for them."

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University Hospital:

Reaching beyond the four walls

University Hospital in Newark, NJ, has also turned to their IPS for real-time feedback from inpatients. Being able to ask targeted questions—and get an immediate response that allows staff to do better—aligns perfectly with the hospital’s patient engagement goals, says Anthony Lisske, Director, Patient Experience. “It gives us insights—and we don’t have to wait a month for them.”

Since implementing its IPS in September 2019, University Hospital has seen scores in key areas rise by 8 percent in a single quarter—compared with 3 percent a year previously.

University Hospital uses its IPS to promote and improve the patient portal and other patient engagement programs that reach beyond the hospital stay. Patient feedback about the portal, collected through the IPS, has sped improvements that make the portal a better tool to promote health.

Lisske says the IPS facilitates follow-up care. Through an agreement with a ride-hailing platform, the hospital is able to offer free transportation to follow-up appointments for patients who need it. The IPS asks patients if they have a ride lined up for follow-up care. If they answer “no,” a representative stops by to tell them about the program and get them signed up if they qualify.

Patients can use the IPS to have their medications delivered to their bedside before discharge. The option saves them a trip to the pharmacy, helps ensure they stay current with their medication regimen, and promotes the use of the in-house pharmacy.

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University Hospital

Mary Bridge:

More than entertainment

Even the TV function is about more than TV. A 2016 study at two Dignity Health facilities showed that the positive distraction offered by entertainment systems helps keep patients calm, especially children and those under stress. The nurses in the study said that entertainment was one of the best uses of interactive patient systems. They also valued patient education videos and content geared to patients' spiritual needs, including content for most religions and mindfulness techniques. The nurses reported the IPS system made their jobs easier, the authors noted.

Mary Bridge, a pediatric hospital in Tacoma, Wash., purchased their IPS with entertainment in mind. "Diversion is important with kids, who are scared and often in pain when in the hospital," says Associate Chief Nurse Executive Jodi Gragg, MN, RN, CPN. The IPS replaced DVDs, which were an infection control risk and also kept disappearing. The system debuted in late 2019 with 20 to 30 movies for entertainment and a host of educational videos. The most watched selections include "Bee Movie" and "Alvin and the Chipmunks."

It's not all pure entertainment. For example, patients and their families can watch easy-to-understand diabetes education videos. Then, the diabetes educator reviews the content, concentrating on the details most important to that particular patient. After the first few months, anecdotal evidence shows the videos save time and cost less than the hospital's previous diabetes education strategy. And most important, the patients retain the information better. Gragg says the hospital will be tracking outcomes and looking at readmission rate and length of stay to measure the impact more precisely.

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– Jodi Gragg, MN, RN, CPN, Associate Chief Nurse Executive, Mary Bridge

Ready for what comes next

The IPS can connect patient engagement to other hospital initiatives, such as staff appreciation. Both Temple and Mary Bridge allow patients to nominate nurses for the DAISY award through the IPS. Temple used their IPS system to play a moving video about staff dedication during staff appreciation week, which occurred at the height of the COVID-19 crisis in Spring 2020. When Temple couldn't bring in therapy animals and shelter pets for their regular visits during the pandemic, the IPS played videos of adoptable dogs and cats that provided some welcome stress relief for patients and staff alike.

When facilities had to quickly expand critical care capacity to accommodate a flood of COVID patients, the IPS expanded too, via tablet computers and smartphones repurposed or donated by the community. Isolated patients used the IPS not only for entertainment but also to stay in touch with family and friends and facilitate telehealth visits with providers to reduce spread of the virus. Patients and staff alike reported this helped relieve stress and facilitate quality care.

All too often in health care, healthcare teams have worked in their own silos focusing on safety or quality of care or patient satisfaction. Integrating those initiatives and aligning the technology that supports them accelerate process changes and improvements, enabling faster response to the inevitable changes and disruptions both locally and nationally. Part of that system alignment includes interoperable IPS technology that helps create a patient experience ecosystem that helps build strong relationships between providers and patients on every level.



pCare's interactive patient engagement solution helps healthcare providers educate and collaborate with patients across the care continuum. The pCare open platform integrates with existing EHR/EMR systems, patient portals, and mobile health applications to connect patients and caregivers. pCare is the partner healthcare organizations trust to improve care quality, patient outcomes, and financial performance.

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