



Using Digital Patient Engagement to Drive Better Access to Care

VISIT US [RELATIENT.COM](https://www.relatient.com) | CALL US 866.473.8160

Introduction

In the healthcare consumer experience, reality does not always meet expectations. Patients today demand a digitized healthcare experience. Although these tools have been in the market for some time, providers are not yet using them to their full potential to enhance the patient journey. As a result, patients are not selecting—and staying loyal to—a healthcare provider, ultimately leaving money on the table on the provider side.

To cater to these digital demands and accelerate healthcare delivery, healthcare organizations need platforms that enable patient self-scheduling, appointment reminders, digital patient intake and a consistent communication experience that eases patient interactions with their healthcare provider. Targeted patient communications with appointment reminders, information to help consumers prepare for appointments, and tips for encouraging preventive care are vital to getting the patient in for care. Meanwhile, streamlined patient intake technology can boost operational efficiencies to meet patient and provider needs. Together, these digital tools provide a connected patient experience.



Attracting Patients With Online Appointment Scheduling

Patients are craving digital resources that let them book an appointment, prepare for their visit, and even remind them that it's on their calendar. They want a way to conveniently access, coordinate and follow up on their healthcare decision, often from a mobile device. But as the industry shifts to meet the demands of healthcare consumerism, there's a wide gap between what patients want or need and what's available from providers.

Recent survey [data from Salesforce](#) found that 71% of healthcare consumers feel responsible for managing their health, but only 23% completely trust the healthcare industry has the technology to enable them to manage their own care.

Many healthcare organizations likely fall short in their digital offerings, and patients are taking notice. The study demonstrated a strong correlation between the availability of consumer-oriented online technology and the likelihood of high-trust patient-provider relationships. Nearly two-thirds of study respondents (64%) associated the availability of three or more online services with the likelihood of a better experience.

Although patient expectations can vary widely based on clinical complexity, demographics, and personal preference, the healthcare industry must embrace the tools other consumer sectors offer.

Patient engagement technologies, like patient self-scheduling, can help fulfill these patient expectations, yet providers are slow to adopt these solutions. 90% of patients, including Baby Boomers, told Salesforce they want access to self-scheduling tools, yet only 53% of providers actually offer them—and many of those are simply online request forms that are not designed to consider provider rules and preferences or integrate into existing workflows.

Provider organizations that help patients find an appointment time that meets their needs, allow them to book the appointment online, and then send personalized reminders, offer the most desired patient experience without any disruption to balancing the patient mix.



Benefits for provider practices

Patient self-scheduling can also reduce administrative challenges on the provider side, particularly related to practice or hospital finances. Organizations are operating under thin margins, especially after two years of a pandemic that kept many patients from accessing healthcare.

Administrative functional challenges, combined with changing patient behavior, all become financial considerations for the provider practices. As a result, organizations have seen reductions in physician revenue, increased staff costs, and surging operating costs.



Additionally, healthcare organizations can use patient self-scheduling tools for new patient acquisition. Per the Salesforce data, 45% of people ages 18 to 29 lack a primary care provider, opening the door for organizations to engage a new patient base.

Online patient scheduling can lead to better capture of other patient information, like insurance or contact information, which leads to improvements in the revenue cycle.

Patient intake technology is an opportunity that enables patients to set up payment plans and get the paperwork out of the

way, reducing wait times and unnecessary stress during the appointment. The provider benefits from reduced manual data entry, increased staff productivity and improved patient flow.

Key Takeaway:

Self-scheduling tools should be closely integrated with patient messaging, appointment reminders and intake technology to support staff productivity and improve revenue.

Closing the loop on patient scheduling, access

The patient journey does not stop with online appointment scheduling. Self-scheduling options, EHR, and the practice management system need to work in tandem with patient communications, whether through broadcast messaging or health maintenance campaigns. This level of interoperability and integration assists organizations in using patient access as both a patient delighter and a source of revenue cycle improvement.

When used effectively, these tools close the gap between what patients expect and the services providers offer.

Using Omnichannel Communication To Activate Patients

The patient experience begins outside the clinic, with the need to find, access, and schedule care. Once the search starts online and an appointment is scheduled, communicating with patients is vital to keep patients on a path to better outcomes. Therefore, organizations must be mindful of their patient engagement strategies to attract and retain today's healthcare consumers.

As different patient types prefer specific communication methods, providers must embrace omnichannel communication solutions that offer a combination of SMS text, 2-way chat, email and phone calls to provide consistent access to care.

Importance of appointment reminders

Online appointment scheduling can bring patients to a practice, but building a meaningful relationship with a patient requires complementary activities.

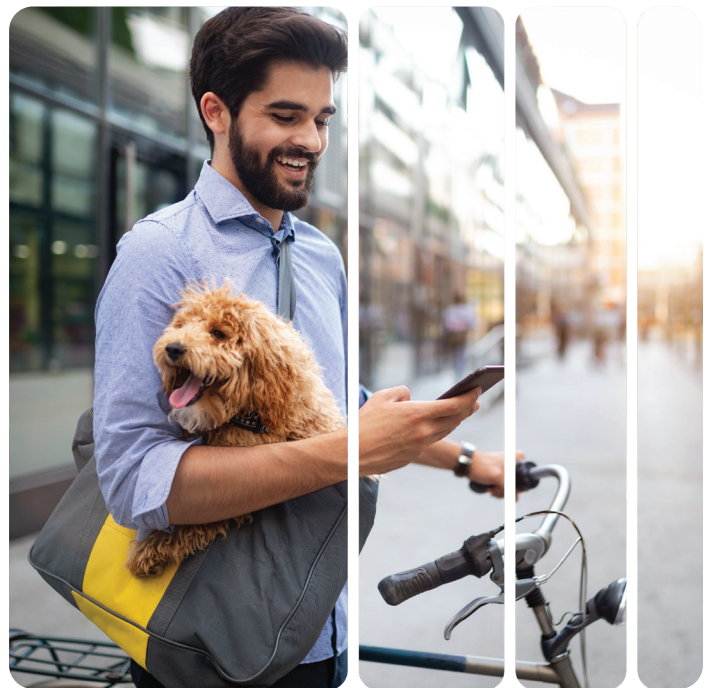
Even when patients schedule appointments, they often don't show up because they're confused, forget, or don't have a simple, automated reminder. To reduce no-shows, providers should offer patients digital appointment reminders with calendar invites to block off when they are scheduled to be at the hospital or clinic. By using omnichannel patient engagement tools, organizations can create a digitized, wraparound patient experience throughout the continuum of care.

This creates areas of opportunity for mobile-friendly, secure communications – texting, including traditional SMS or iMessage type functions, but fundamentally the communication should be mobile-first, secure, and asynchronous.

Focusing on the whole patient journey

The appointment date and time are just two things people need to know before visiting the doctor. But the world of healthcare is increasingly complex for patients, and organizations need to simplify matters and help people prepare.

Patients experience pain points across their wellness journey that are simple to solve with the right technology. Disjointed communication from healthcare providers leads to confusion and appointment forgetfulness. Organizations should tap into the tools that address those pain points by understanding the role communication and scheduling now plays in the new patient experience.



Patient communication should focus on more than just an individual episode of care. As healthcare organizations confront low patient volumes and, consequently, lower margins, they should also concentrate on omnichannel patient engagement that encourages wellness and preventative visits. One example of this messaging is health maintenance campaigns.

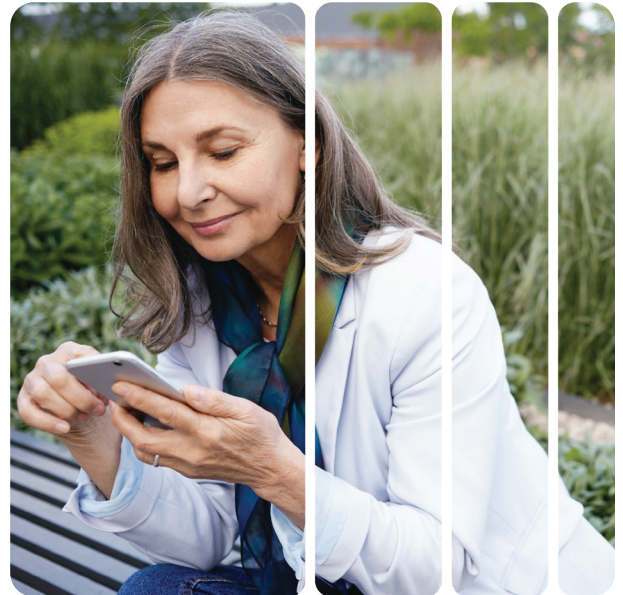
Health maintenance campaigns help providers close gaps in care for patients suffering chronic illnesses, drive more preventative care appointments and ensure patients have the appropriate care requirements pre- and post-appointment. These messages support a patient's ongoing wellness journey, drive patient retention, boost revenue, and support value-based care initiatives on the provider side. Additionally, they're effective education tools.

Healthcare organizations need to bring this outreach and patient education into the digital realm. Reminding patients of the importance of preventative or wellness screenings helps get patients on the schedule, creating positive benefits for both the patient and the provider.

For patients, getting a preventative screening can help identify medical issues before they become an emergency. On the provider side, wellness checks and preventative care access can help get patients on the schedule, improving volume and cash flow. Wellness checks and screening also help prevent more costly acute episodes of care.

As a clinically motivated marketing function, technology allows providers to communicate with patients regardless of the appointment type. Whether they send well-baby visits to new parents or diabetic A1C reminders to patients who have pre-diabetes or diabetes, the messages can be segmented by the last visit date or by any number of demographic or clinical data.

That means providers need to examine their access strategies before the point-of-service and think of a quality patient experience as something that begins with serving their pre-service needs, like simple self-scheduling. By understanding the different points within a patient's care journey, providers can offer the right engagement solutions at the right time to support them.



Key Takeaway:

Communication tools need to be integrated with self-scheduling systems. People do not want multiple digital healthcare experiences. They want the whole experience to be seamless and coordinated across their unique healthcare journey.

Optimizing Intake To Accelerate Care Delivery

After a patient self-schedules and receives appointment reminders and necessary information about the healthcare visit, it's time to navigate the intake process. Streamlining this process allows for new levels of efficiency, resulting in higher-quality interactions.

Healthcare organizations can achieve better workflows and align patient and provider experiences by implementing a proactive patient intake process. Leveraging patient intake tools, which should align with the scheduling and communication systems, allows patients to complete necessary forms, understand and even fulfill financial obligations, provide direct feedback via survey, and ultimately have a connected engagement experience throughout their care.

Value of a streamlined point-of-service experience

The patient intake process needs to accommodate different patient types and priorities. A new patient must complete new patient registration forms, sign HIPAA disclosures, and provide medical history details (among other essential information) to allow them access to the clinic or hospital system. Existing patients might need to confirm their history or update demographic information but have likely completed their paperwork already.

Having the intake process occur digitally before a patient even steps foot into the clinic means they can quickly move into the exam room, cutting out the lag time in the waiting room and delivering a better patient experience. In 2018, data from Vitals [revealed](#) that healthcare organizations with shorter wait times see higher patient experience scores. Five-star providers boasted wait times of 13 minutes compared to 34-minute wait times for one-star providers.

Boosting cash flow with optimized intake processes

Providing out-of-pocket costs and payment plan options for the patient during and after the point-of-service allows them to plan ahead from a financial perspective. In turn, the patient becomes more likely to pay the bill, keeping a healthy cash flow for the provider.

[Research](#) shows that most healthcare providers rely on paper billing options, even though nearly half of consumers prefer digital communications about their financial responsibility and paying their bills online.

Lack of alignment in provider capabilities and consumer preference could be causing delays in collections, the data suggested, but streamlined digital billing and reminders could ease that issue.

The No Surprise Act principles are very well understood—patients don't want to get a bill for something they didn't expect. Setting expectations is directly proportional to collections.

By combining patient intake and communication solutions into a single platform, you set expectations, increase transparency in communication, and deliver a proactive experience for patients and providers.



Conclusion

The patient experience is not linear. It is cyclical as patients move from self-scheduling to preparing for the appointment, receiving care, and back to scheduling their next check-up. The digital patient experience needs to reflect that pattern and support an ongoing cycle that continues to evolve.

Once a patient finds a provider who meets their needs and a convenient appointment time, patient experience technologies must continue to support the healthcare journey. Implementing online appointment reminders that provide patients with a calendar notification and information about the facility and any upcoming procedures will be essential to preparing the consumer. Supplementing that patient communication and education with digital patient intake streamlines the healthcare encounter for both patients and providers, delivering on operational efficiency that can help achieve a frictionless healthcare experience.

Key Takeaway:

Whether you visited a single provider only once throughout your life or 30 times in one year is independent of the fact that those touchpoints should be contiguous and additive to the previous one.

Better patient engagement leads to better patient revenue. Dash by Relatient delivers with the best-in-class scheduling and communication tools. For more information or to schedule a demo, visit www.heydash.com.

Produced by

xtelligent
HEALTHCARE MEDIA

© 2022 Relatient

About Relatient

RELATIENT

At Relatient, we believe that the key to better health is better access. Better access lies at the intersection of scheduling and communication. Our Dash® platform combines best-in-class patient self-scheduling and centralized scheduling with modern two-way patient communication tools to provide better access for patients, better utilization for providers, and better outcomes for all.