

Patient Communication

Engage patients through
video, voice & text

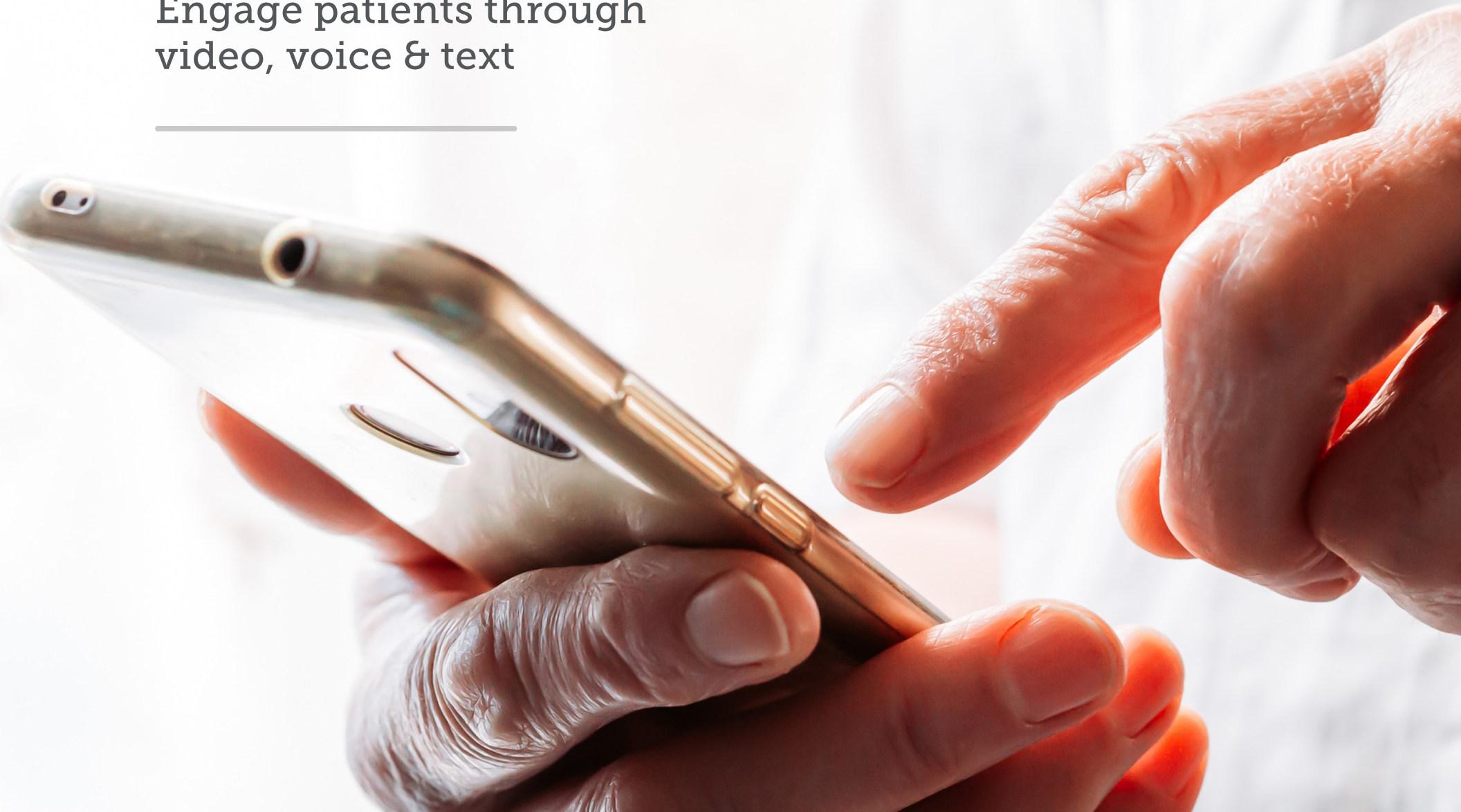


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Introduction



"Take two aspirin and
text me in the morning" —
how patient communication
transforms healthcare

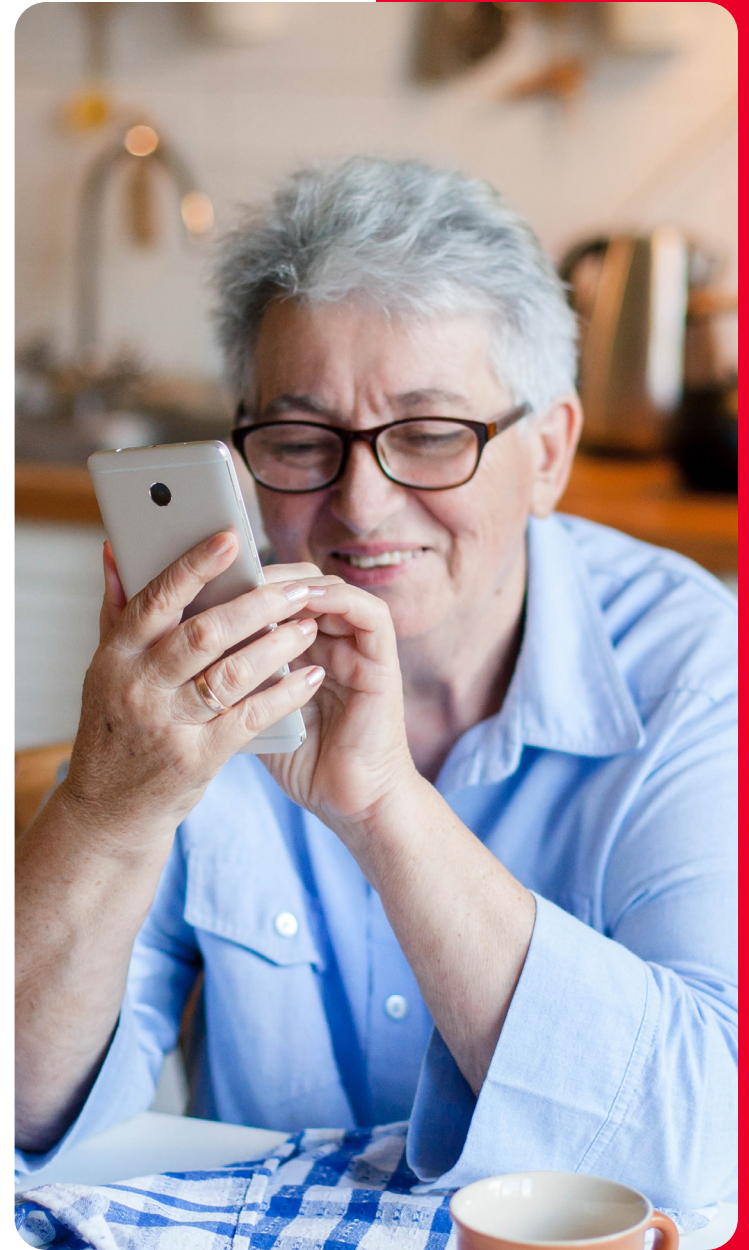
Introduction

How patient communication transforms healthcare

The healthcare industry has a complicated relationship with modern technology. Leaders eagerly invest in the latest and greatest diagnostic tools and medical equipment to enhance treatment, yet, despite all the clinical advances in healthcare, many organizations still rely on landline phones, fax machines, and pagers.

This is frustrating for clinicians who know there is a better way to communicate but must put away their smartphones and use outdated tools on the job. It's also frustrating for patients who can bank via text and order groceries with an app, yet have no choice but to play phone tag with their physicians.

Not only do communication delays negatively impact patient satisfaction, but they can also affect patient health, impact safety, and increase hospital readmission rates.



For patients, what type of communication **is most likely** to earn a reply?



Letter in the mail



Email



Missed call / voicemail



Message in a patient portal



Text message

Extensive research indicates that sending a text message is the most effective way to connect with a patient. In fact, when it comes to a phone call, only 52% of calls are picked up by Americans, and 70% of Americans will not answer their phones from an unfamiliar number.

And email isn't any better. Almost 75% of consumers are overwhelmed by email overload. More than **244 billion emails are sent every day**, yet only **23% of emails from businesses** are read. In contrast, text messages have an **open rate of 98%**.

Talk to healthcare professionals about how effective they believe their patient communication is, and the common refrains will include:



No one answers the phone.

We leave voice message after voice message.

Some patients don't even have their voicemail set up, so we just wait for a call back.

When we finally get a call back from a patient, they often need to talk to the nurse who in many cases is with another patient.



Industries like hospitality, finance, and retail have known for decades that being tightly connected to the customer is critical to success. These industries connect with their customers in a deeper way, creating personalized and user-friendly experiences both digitally and in-person. And their digital presence often leads with a smart device strategy.

Healthcare must evolve its communication in similar ways so they can better engage the patient and scale operations to serve more patients with fewer resources. As health systems venture into this new territory, it's a bit scary. What are the rules of engagement? How do I protect personal health information? When do I use this new mode of communication with my patients?

This eBook is intended to help healthcare systems start to explore the use cases and benefits of virtual care and how to effectively incorporate this new mode of communication to better engage patients and improve outcomes.





Chapter One

01

Macro trends accelerating the
need for patient communication

Chapter 01

Welcome to the age of telehealth and virtual check-ins

Communication overload is an old problem in healthcare, but without new solutions, it will only get worse.

Clinicians are outnumbered, and at the same time the “silver tsunami” of Baby Boomers is growing in magnitude, the shift to value-based care is putting a greater burden on providers to keep chronically ill patients out of the hospital. That’s no small feat, especially considering **60%** of adults in the U.S. have at least one chronic disease and **40%** have more than one, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Without an easy, secure way to remotely engage patients, providers will be unprepared for these macro trends:

1. Clinician shortage
2. Aging Boomers
3. Value-based care
4. Patient empowerment



Clinician shortage

Doctors are already outnumbered about 2,000 to 1, with the average physician seeing 20 patients a day and spending **25%** of their time on paperwork.

Such patient loads will continue to grow over the next decade, and **by 2032, the U.S. will experience a shortage of up to 122,000 physicians**, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges.

Nurses are also in increasingly short supply as patient populations grow and Boomer nurses continue retiring. The U.S. will need an additional **203,700 new registered nurses each year through 2026** to meet the increased demand, according to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing.

With fewer physicians to care for patients, and fewer nurses to help them, patient communication will inevitably suffer — that is, unless care providers have more efficient ways to connect with their ever-expanding patient rosters.

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We foresee the growth of patient text messaging to help us scale our clinical and support staff to service **10x more patients** and are preparing ourselves operationally to do this.

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Matthew Fenty

Director of Innovation, Strategic Partnerships
St. Luke's University Health Network

Aging boomers

Not only do doctors have more patients, but also their average patient is getting older. The number of American seniors is expected to grow from 52 million in 2018 to 95 million by 2060.

And seniors tend to have more complex health needs, more doctors, and more medications — which means more to remember and more opportunities to be non-compliant with their care plans. Despite their advancing age, Boomers remain a fiercely independent group.

For seniors to safely age in place, they need better ways to connect with their physicians in between visits. The federal government agrees, and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has made sweeping changes over the past few years to incentivize the use of telehealth solutions for Medicare Advantage patients — including remote patient monitoring, virtual checkups, and other digital technology that helps physicians scale chronic care management programs.



of Boomers say they'll never move from their current home, according to a recent Chase Bank survey.



Meanwhile, an AARP survey found that **three out of four** adults over age 50 want to stay in their homes and communities for as long as possible.

Value-based care

The Affordable Care Act mandated a rapid shift from “fee for service” payment models to “fee for value” payment models.

Both CMS and state-run Medicaid programs have created value-based care models that require providers to prove they’re meeting quality standards and helping patients while also reducing costs. Provider performance is then tied to incentives and/or penalties. Hospitals have been hit particularly hard by the shift to value-based care.

Under CMS’s Hospital Readmission Reduction Program, 2,583 hospitals (87% of all eligible hospitals) had their Medicare payments reduced 2019, which cost them

\$563 million

As hospital margins get squeezed on every front and physicians struggle to keep up with patient loads, new communication channels allow health systems to scale their operations in order to serve more patients more efficiently.

Patient empowerment

Patients are accustomed to using their smartphones to manage every aspect of their modern lives – until they enter the healthcare system, where they’re confronted with an archaic array of phone calls, voice messages, and faxing.

These outmoded methods can undermine patients’ confidence in the quality of care they’re receiving and place an unnecessary burden on people who are already contending with the stress of being hospitalized or battling a serious illness.

That’s not good for the patient experience or for healthcare organizations. Competition is stiff, patients are increasingly becoming payers, and thanks to the Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) survey, bad patient reviews can also lower a hospital’s reimbursement rates. (On the other hand, high HCAHPS scores can earn hospitals bonus funds.)

For patients who expect multi-channel communication, a hospital’s inability to leverage mobile technologies will increasingly become an HCAHPS liability. On the other hand, higher patient satisfaction — through HCAHPS scores and even online user reviews — leads to more patients and more revenue.

Chapter Two

02

Leaving voicemail in
a virtual care world



Chapter 02

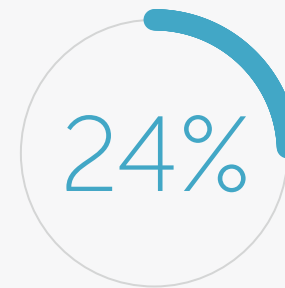
Patients prefer a richer, more convenient experience

Healthcare communications might be stubbornly stuck in the past, but consumers are not.

The “app economy” has shortened everyone’s tolerance for inefficient processes and set an expectation for immediate, on-demand service. In the time it takes to play phone tag with a physician, people can have lunch delivered, order a ride-share, balance their checkbook, find a date, and watch a movie — all from their smartphones.

Phone tag is particularly frustrating for younger generations, who famously prefer texting over talking and are accustomed to getting answers quickly.

Young people aren’t the only ones who appreciate virtual care options such as text or video. People are busy, and phone calls require them to stop what they’re doing. They can read and respond to text messages on their own time. Then there’s the proliferation of unsolicited robocalls that dramatically reduces everyone’s desire to answer calls from unknown numbers.

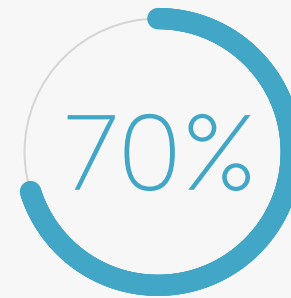


of Gen Z patients are “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” with their physicians’ “responsiveness to follow-up questions outside the appointment,” and **15% of Millennials** feel the same way (vs. 10-12% among older generations).

Beyond reminders

Whatever their reasons, consumers across generations will increasingly look for healthcare providers to provide multi-channel communication.

Many providers already use reminder apps that automatically text patients about upcoming appointments. While text reminders are a step in the right direction, these apps leverage unsecure, non-HIPAA-compliant, consumer-based messaging channels such as SMS. This is outside the purview of hospital IT and compliance teams, and patient privacy is not protected. Providers can only text limited information (nothing identifiable), and it's a one-way conversation. If a patient needs to reschedule an appointment or ask a simple question about how to prep for an upcoming procedure, they have to make a call and leave a message.



of patients are more likely to choose a provider that sends text reminders about follow-up care, according to the Accenture 2019 Digital Health Consumer Survey.

The problem with patient portals

Most healthcare organizations already let patients request refills, schedule appointments, and receive appointment reminder messages via patient portals provided by their electronic health records (EHR) software.

In some cases, patients can even send messages to their clinicians. Of course, that's one more inbox for clinicians to check and one more inbox for patients to manage.

According to the American Hospital Association, 93% of hospitals allow patients online access to patient EHR portals, but less than 20% of patients ever log in. Unique URLs, apps that must be downloaded, passwords, and multi-step authentication processes, and complex interfaces make these portals confusing for patients to navigate and a less than ideal way to communicate with providers.

That's largely because EHR solutions were designed for patient reference and to securely share patient test results and records but not for ongoing outpatient communication. Most people don't log into patient portals on a regular basis. Some people don't even check their personal email accounts regularly. But the average person looks at their smartphone 52 times a day, according to Deloitte's 2018 Global Mobile Consumer Survey, and texting is the top communication service, with 93% of consumers now using it.

If providers want to keep up with patients and stay on top of their growing workloads, they need more than patient portals and reminder apps. They need an easy, secure way for clinical and administrative staff to communicate with patients and other care professionals using the convenience and immediacy of voice, video, or text.





Chapter Three

03

How health systems score
quick wins with telehealth
and virtual check-ins

Chapter 03

**Best of both worlds — talk to staff,
talk to patients using one app**

Unlike patient reminder apps, Clinical Communication & Collaboration (CC&C) platforms with integrated telehealth capabilities of video, voice, and text, provide users with access to a rich array of engagement options.

And unlike EHR patient portals, CC&C platforms with integrated virtual care capabilities are built to connect the entire clinical and non-clinical staff network within a hospital or health system. The network provides staff caring for patients with easy access to case managers, social workers, consulting physicians, and other clinical experts, who can easily be looped into text-based conversations, group phone calls, or video consults.



Quick wins by department

How can health systems use the combination of clinical communication and virtual care across various departments, and what are the advantages?

Discharge process

Nearly every patient discharged from a hospital requires some degree of follow-up to ensure a condition hasn't worsened, that patients are taking medications correctly, or that they have set the follow-up appointments their ED doctor recommended. With dismal statistics around phone call answer rates and portal engagement, the struggle for case managers and other care providers is real.

Adding to the challenge, people immediately forget roughly **40 to 80%** of information provided in a medical setting, according to a study by the Department of Psychology at Allegheny College, and the more information they receive, the less they retain.

If nurses and other care managers can communicate directly with patients via video, voice, or text, they can help ensure that patients have all the information they need to heal at home, thereby reducing the chance they'll return to the ED for the same condition.

Surgical departments and surgical centers

Surgeries often require clinicians to connect with patients both before and after the procedures in order to ensure the best outcomes. For complex procedures, communicating instructions for surgical prep well in advance is critical. Engaging patients through video, voice, or text prior to an important appointment can ensure the proper prep process is followed and can create an open dialogue between patient and provider, ease anxiety, and help reduce no-show problems that cost health systems millions of dollars a year.

Once the procedure is completed, frequent follow-ups are important to ensure the patient follows their care plan and their doctors' instructions. The problem is that patients get a lot of instructions very quickly, often while they're in pain and/or taking medications that inhibit focus and memory. Text-based or video-based follow-up with patients and their family members reinforces proper adherence and can be critical to a healthy recovery. Direct text-based or video-based follow-up with patients and their family members is critical to a healthy recovery.

Care providers can reach out to patients after they get home and have had time to digest the information they were provided at discharge, confirm they have what they need and know what to do, answer questions, and even send links to articles or videos about disease management education.

Quick wins by department

Home health, palliative care, and hospice

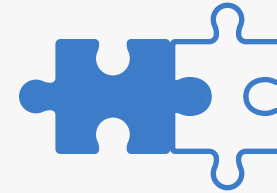
Perhaps no better case exists for text-based family communication and video-based patient check-ins than home health. For recently discharged hospital patients needing in-home care, the logistical coordination with a home health nurse is vital to build trust and to ensure quality of care. Patients receiving long-term care at home often have different caregivers at different times, making the need for video and text-based communication even more important.

This will become more imperative in the coming years, as palliative care faces intense staffing shortages. Roughly **40%** of currently active palliative care physicians are 56 or older and nearing retirement, according to Health Affairs, which predicts there won't be enough palliative care doctors to meet patient demand until 2045, unless new policies are adopted. Meanwhile, there will be 7.8 million home care job openings from 2016 to 2026, according to research firm PHI.

Primary care

Using mobile devices to communicate directly with patients and their families helps increase engagement. Patients feel like they're being heard and that staff is more empathetic to what they're going through. For certain patients, transportation to and from a physician's office is physically, logistically, or financially difficult, so the opportunity for remote consults can prevent them from skipping important follow-ups.

Texting can also be a valuable component of chronic care management and remote patient monitoring programs, both of which are now reimbursable for non-hospital physicians treating Medicare Advantage patients. Physician offices can use the technology to check in with patients, share educational resources, and answer questions about medications and upcoming appointments.



Tackling a critical piece of population management

Ensuring the long-term health and wellness of an entire population is one of the most critical ways health systems will be able to handle the onslaught of aging patients and increasingly complex cases.

Keeping people well is often easier than treating them, but it still requires time, effort, and a lot of communication — which would be all but impossible without advanced communication tools that easily connect networks of health professionals, are cost effective and secure, and are familiar and preferred by patients.

Chapter Four

04

What to look for in a
virtual care solution



Chapter 04

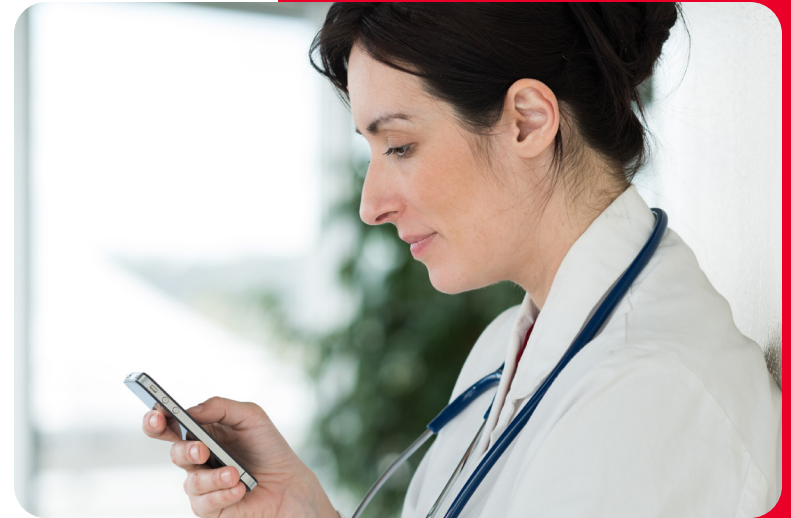
Virtual care solutions: Must-haves + pitfalls to avoid

All patient communication solutions are not created equal. As healthcare organizations weigh their options for telehealth and virtual check-in technology, here's what to consider:

Security

Any technology that providers use to discuss patient information — with patients or among clinicians — must be HIPAA-compliant and Healthcare Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH)-compliant. These laws govern electronic-protected health information and require that all personally identifiable data be stored and transmitted in an encrypted, secure fashion.

While consumer applications, such as the native SMS feature on any smartphone, may be encrypted, they can be hacked. For clinicians to text anything more than patient initials, they need a secure communication platform that is HIPAA-compliant. Third-party certifications such as HITRUST can save IT teams hours of vetting vendors and provide expert reassurance.



Simplicity

Patient portals are secure, but they're not simple to use. Patients must authenticate their accounts, remember their usernames and passwords, navigate clunky interfaces to find the information they need, and in some cases, download a mobile app just to have a decent experience on mobile devices. For a patient communication solution to be effective and highly adopted, it must be convenient and extremely simple to use — patients receive a text, tap a link, and are immediately connected by text, video, or voice with their provider.

Provider experience

Clinicians don't need more technology; they need technology that does more. When the telehealth and virtual check-in solution is part of the same clinical communication & collaboration (CC&C) platform they use to communicate with co-workers, it's easy for them to switch seamlessly between provider and patient worlds. They don't have to toggle between apps to communicate directly with patients, and because CC&Cs can be integrated with an EHR, patient information is right at their fingertips during the text conversation.

Provider control

Texting with patients can dramatically reduce the number of phone calls and voicemails that physicians and their staff must respond to each day. On the other hand, if doctors allow every patient they've ever had to text them with any concern or question, the new communication channel can quickly become flooded. That's why it's important for patient messaging solutions to let providers control the engagement — including who can text the doctor, how often, and for how long.

Integration capabilities

In some cases, digital patient communication (via video or text) is reimbursable. When patient messaging goes through a sophisticated CC&C solution, those interactions can be captured in the EHR as billable conversations — making it easier than ever for healthcare organizations to get paid.





Chapter Five

05

3 best practices for implementing a virtual care solution

Chapter 05

3 best practices for virtual care success

Telehealth and virtual check-ins involve implementing new processes for most healthcare providers, but the effort offers new opportunities to engage, educate, and connect with patients. Here's where to start:

1. Start small to go big.

As with any game-changing application, the best way to start is small, with a test group of users such as case managers or nurses whose need to communicate with patients is high. These early adopters should be eager to use the solution and be ready to help work out any kinks in the deployment. Pilot users can help leaders design new workflows around the technology, determine the best use cases for it, and act as internal champions who help get other people in the organization excited for their turn to deploy the new solution. Be sure to closely track before-and-after data to prove out the value.



2. Identify areas where patient communication is most challenging.

The best pilot test groups are enthusiastic about the technology because they need it most. They have major patient communication challenges, so they'll get quick wins from the solution and keep the momentum going for large-scale implementation. For example, if patients are giving low HCAHPS scores for discharge preparedness, then disease management education might be a good place to start. Or if no-shows and last-minute procedure cancellations are really hurting the bottom line, then maybe primary care or surgical centers would benefit most.

3. Find a trusted, experienced vendor.

Modern telehealth and virtual check-in technologies are relatively new, but text communication in healthcare is not. Early CC&C vendors have spent nearly a decade building out secure, efficient platforms that seamlessly connect care teams. Now the most innovative vendors are figuring out how to use their experience, integration capabilities, and HIPAA-compliant technology to usher in a new era of patient communication.

A vendor's industry experience matters but so does their reliability, scalability, ease of use, implementation expertise, and customer experience. To find trusted vendors, it is always best to ask for recommendations from other healthcare leaders and from technology vendors they trust.





Conclusion

At the same time that care organizations are being crushed under the weight of an ever-increasing volume of phone calls, voicemails, and pages, consumers increasingly want digital solutions that help them manage their wellness and communicate with their care providers.

Telehealth and virtual care solutions solve both problems at once, in a highly integrated yet easy to use way. When virtual care is used as an extension of an existing healthcare communication platform, it doesn't add additional apps or complexity for physicians, and it carries the power to positively impact patients' lives.

With better patient communication comes lower readmission rates, higher HCAHPS scores, and better patient outcomes. That's a lot of value from something most people do every single day — texting, calling, and chatting by video on a smartphone. Now clinicians can do it too.

About TigerConnect

TigerConnect is healthcare's most widely adopted communication platform – uniquely modernizing care collaboration among doctors, nurses, care teams, and patients. TigerConnect is the only solution that combines a consumer-like user experience for both clinical and patient communication with serious security, privacy, and clinical workflow requirements that today's healthcare organizations demand. TigerConnect accelerates productivity, reduces costs, and improves patient outcomes.

Trusted by more than 6,000 healthcare organizations, TigerConnect maintains 99.99% verifiable uptime and processes more than 10 million messages each day. To learn more about TigerConnect, visit tigerconnect.com.

Learn how clients like **RWJBarnabas**, **Geisinger**, and **LifePoint** are using TigerConnect to solve healthcare's biggest communication challenges.

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