



Source: 2017 Consumer Healthcare Priorities Study: What Patients and Doctors Want from the Health Care System; Council of Accountable Physician Practices (CAPP)/Focus Group Research Results

# What Do Patients Really Want?

*Technology to bridge the wellness–satisfaction gap*

## ■ By Tashfeen Ekram, M.D., FACR

Imagine a 20,000-square-foot healthcare facility with floor-to-ceiling windows, modern designer furniture, and award-winning food. The service is impeccable. The staff are all smiling as they greet you, eager to see to your every need and make your stay as comfortable as possible. Now, consider your situation—you're sick. You have a scheduled surgery, a medical emergency, or you're going to visit a loved one who is recovering from a serious illness.

Resort-like hospital or system amenities dominate much of the conversation surrounding the patient experience. They promise a level of comfort rivaling five-star resorts when you're within the organization's four walls. But so much of what impacts health happens beyond these plush walls. Ultimately, the satisfaction a patient experiences at a healthcare organization is a means to an end, and wellness is the end. True patient success necessitates a practical strategy that unifies patient experience and patient engagement, and technology can be that unifier.

### Keep Things Simple and Intuitive

An article by Goldman et al. discusses the increasing investments hospitals have made in resort-style amenities for patients and suggests that patients may be attracted to these perks as a kind of proxy for clinical quality.<sup>1</sup> "Data on clinical quality are complex, multidimensional, and noisy," the authors say. "Consumers may be making choices on the basis of amenities because they are easier to understand." Overwhelmed by complicated public reporting and the complexities of clinical quality measures, patients who can afford to do so—much like people drawn to books with colorful covers—may choose hospitals that offer these types of amenities with little else to go on.

However, when asked directly, patients prioritize elements of healthcare practice and culture that directly benefit their health. Their

top three priorities, according to the 2017 Consumer Health Care Priorities Study,<sup>2</sup> include a strong relationship with their provider, the use of evidence-based medicine, and care coordination. Strikingly, these were the doctors' top three priorities as well. Patient priorities seem to call for a focus on clear, two-way communication between the care team and the patient. The care team engages the patient by always asking about their treatment preferences, communicating about procedures and treatments, and effectively transitioning care from provider to provider. This communication helps organizations attract patients not by the resort experiences they offer but by the focused attention they provide to patient needs.

### Create an Open-Door Culture

Patient success does not begin when a patient walks through the front doors of a doctor's office or hospital. It begins when a patient encounters a level of uncertainty or suffering that necessitates interacting with a healthcare provider. The patient may have had to research network provider options, pick up a phone to make an appointment, wait for the next available opening, potentially reschedule that appointment, and so on. The sum of these interactions impacts both the patient's ability to access care as well as the experience in doing so. It sets the stage for patient-provider interactions to come and patient success throughout the care journey.

Studies have substantiated the link between patient experience and quality outcomes. A systematic review by Doyle et al. found positive associations in nearly all relevant studies between patient experience, safety, and clinical effectiveness.<sup>3</sup>

## Patient Success Leaders

Convenient and secure mobile messaging tools ensure that the entire care team stays abreast of a patient's progress and that the patient has 24/7 access to the care team when a new symptom or question outside of the traditional allotted appointment time presents itself.

Providers who actively integrate technology that eases and streamlines two-way communication between care teams and patients can advance their organizational goals and become leaders in achieving patient success.

An open-door culture that allows patients to self-schedule appointments conveniently and in the method of their choice gets patients through the doors quickly. Communicating clearly throughout the process moves the needle forward substantially and sets up the patient for success.

### Adopt Technology with a Human Touch

Technology is becoming ubiquitous throughout health care, and new advances arise nearly daily. From Amazon's health records mining initiative to hospital beds that digitally monitor patients' vital signs,<sup>4,5</sup> these innovations offer advances in treatment and improved patient health outcomes. But as Abraham Verghese said in his popular *Ted Talk*, the human touch in medicine may just be the most powerful innovation to come.<sup>6</sup>

Automating time-intensive tasks, including manual phone call reminders, discharge follow-ups for routine procedures, and outreach to high-risk patients, saves the entire care team valuable time. Providers can invest this time

in person-to-person communications fundamental to providing health care (see "Patient Success Leaders").

### Simple, Open, and Personable

Technology can serve a role in enhancing the patient-provider relationship, not stifling it. Providers and patients alike intuitively understand that the process of healthcare delivery should be simple, open, and personable throughout the care journey. While the industry puts increasing pressure on healthcare organizations to deliver exceptional service while simultaneously achieving benchmarks on key quality thresholds, a comprehensive approach to patient success is essential. Ensuring that the patient remains at the center of their own care journey bridges the gap between wellness and experience and ensures patient and organizational success alike. [GRU](#)

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Table 1

## Identifying Aspects of Patient Experience and Search Terms

Relational aspects	Functional aspects
Emotional and psychological support; relieving fear and anxiety; treated with respect, kindness, dignity, compassion, and understanding	Effective treatment delivered by trusted professionals
Participation of patient in decisions and their understanding of their condition; respecting and understanding their beliefs, values, concerns, and preferences	Timely, tailored, and expert management of physical symptoms
Involvement of, and support for, family and caregivers in decisions	Attention to physical support needs and environmental needs (e.g., clean, safe, comfortable environment)
Clear, comprehensible information and communication tailored to patient needs to support informed decisions (awareness of available options, risks, and benefits of treatments) and enable self-care	Coordination and continuity of care; smooth transitions from one setting to another
Transparency, honesty, and disclosure when something goes wrong	

Source: 2013. Systematic Review of Evidence on the Links Between Patient Experience and Clinical Safety and Effectiveness, *BMJ Open*

### References

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