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PATIENT SATISFACTION NEWS

Seven Outcomes of Successful Patient Engagement Strategies

There are numerous patient engagement strategies aimed at improving care. What are the outcomes that show these solutions are working?

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October 01, 2018 - This is the last article of a three-part series centered on the steps required to make a patient engagement initiative successful. The first article, **Three Steps to Jumpstart Effective Patient Engagement Initiatives (https://patientengagementhit.com/news/effective-patient-engagement-strategies-three-steps-to-jump-start-your-initiative)**, *focused on getting started. The second article,* **Three Keys to Implementing Successful Patient Engagement Strategies (https://patientengagementhit.com/news/three-keys-to-implementing-successful-patient-engagement-strategies)**, *focused on implementation.*

Patient engagement affects every patient interaction across the care continuum. Accordingly, the outcomes that you can expect will come from every area of the organization. When refining targeted outcomes, let metrics be your guide. Measurement shows us what's working and what's not.

Patient engagement requires constant monitoring to enable continuous fine-tuning. An effective system can provide data on the clinicians, clinics, and hospitals that are getting the best results. This data and good reporting tools will help you answer the all-important question: Why are some teams getting great traction and others aren't? Data also reveals the messages and delivery mechanisms that work, and highlights patients who need greater attention.

Here are some of the outcomes that you can realize:

1. Boosting engagement: An effective patient engagement solution delivers information that is developed with an understanding of human behavior, including what motivates action, how people process information, and what builds trust. Engagement is not a one-way relationship. While the goal for those in health care is to deliver meaningful information and drive patient action, we must also focus on building trust with patients. Without trust, patients will not engage. It is imperative for patients to feel that their voice is being heard through empathetic conversations. Those conversations should be driven by a solid patient engagement message that has been studied and refined, based on continuing evaluation of patient responses and staff feedback.

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Since your organization's portal is likely the gateway you'll use to automate aspects of engagement, portal use is key. Patient engagement programs can track which techniques result in higher adoption rates, for example:

- Offering faster test results

- Streamlining prescription renewals

- Access to 24/7 appointment scheduling

These programs can also help reveal which tactics result in patient activation. We need patients to *act* on the guidance provided, whether it be scheduling an annual physical or diagnostic test, following their rehab regimen, or improving their diet. Without patient activation, organizations will not attain the outcomes they have targeted.

2. Managing care transitions and reducing readmissions: Engaging patients beyond a health crisis and throughout their recovery is critical to reducing complications, avoiding readmissions, and monitoring the recovery process. A patient engagement system can support an array of transitions, including hospital-to-home transitions after a procedure or chronic condition episode, or rehabilitation-to-home transitions after a period of therapy.

Two of the most effective means of reducing readmissions are quality interactive education tools and follow-up phone calls to the patient. The hospital experience is stressful for patients. Being alone or suddenly having family around at the bedside can make it even more complicated. Stress can increase when patients are sent home. They receive a lot of information, from discharge paperwork to care and follow-up instructions. All this occurs while most still feel unwell.

Patient education: Every clinician is an educator. However, it is impossible for each clinician to deliver the same quality education to every patient at every encounter. It simply cannot be replicated and measured, even using a script. Clinicians have a different amount of time with each patient and each patient has a unique way of learning. That's why it is best to enable them with quality, interactive education materials using appropriate technology. This way, patients can watch and interact with the materials on their own time and as many times as they want. The content should be developed for different learning styles, tested, and improved over time. Of course, educational content must be easy to access. Delivering consistent education using technology helps patients take greater ownership of their care.

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For example, a Cleveland Clinic **study (https://www.amjmed.com/article/S0002-9343(16)30667-2/abstract)** showed that unsatisfactory bowel preparation has been reported in up to 33 percent of screening colonoscopies. Patients who viewed an educational, interactive video prior to their colonoscopy procedure had higher rates of satisfactory preparation – 92.3 percent compared to 87.4 percent for the group that did not watch it.

Follow-up phone calls: In addition, a good patient engagement system should facilitate follow-up phone calls to make sure patients have filled their medications and that they are taking them as prescribed. After a hospital visit, a post-discharge call can verify that patients have scheduled a follow-up appointment with their primary care physician, and that they have transportation. Follow-up calls can help identify and address changes in a patient's status, possibly preventing another hospital visit. These calls also are a way to touch base without requiring a visit. They can help detect signs of depression, loneliness, poor eating

habits, etc. Implementing technology that automates the process of patient outreach means that staff is not wasting time simply trying to get patients on the phone when they are available. As a result, clinicians can work at the top of their license and provide counsel specific to the patient's condition.

3. Improving patient safety: A patient engagement system provides consistent and easy-to-understand content that patients can consume on their own time, via the devices that work best for them. Step-by-step tips for maintaining wellness, easy to understand instructions for taking medications, and programs for effectively managing chronic conditions are central to self-care. Better-informed patients translate to fewer adverse events and better outcomes.

4. Increasing HCAHPS scores: Receiving effective and quality health care is not something that just happens. It is requires partnership between the patient and the care team. When patients understand what is happening around them, they feel more in control and have less fear and anxiety. They feel more satisfied with their care. A good patient engagement system will help you manage expectations during encounters. This can be automated to occur before the hospitalization, which frees up clinicians to have more personalized conversations with patients.

5. Enhancing clinicians' workflows and satisfaction: Prepared patients save clinicians time, and patients who know what to expect are less likely to cancel an office visit or procedure. Patients' most common questions should be answered by engagement programs, thus reducing calls to the office. For example, nurses can alert a patient with a scheduled surgical procedure to watch an educational video via the portal. The patient can watch at his or her convenience. Nurses can then respond to individual questions, helping optimize clinicians' time and potentially improving **job satisfaction (https://education.healthcaresource.com/clinician-job-dissatisfaction/)**.

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6. Empowering patients: Wellness is highly dependent on attitude. When patients receive clear and timely communication in a way that makes them feel heard and appreciated, they better understand and participate in their own care as a true partner. They have more meaningful interactions with their care team. For example, exploring treatment options when a range of choices exist helps patients weigh the risks and benefits of different approaches. They feel empowered by understanding their options and being allowed to express their preferences. In addition, technology can enable family and the care network to be supportive, regardless of their location. Patients and families who have a good experience with an organization and its staff form a stronger connection to their team and are more confident about the care received.

7. Promoting positive results: Highlighting good results helps motivate clinicians when they see that their efforts are making a difference. Be sure to report on positive results, even when you achieve outcomes that you weren't expecting, such as the following:

Example 1: A large, multi-hospital organization standardized the education for a common disease process and then sent patients more information about their care via a tailored video program. Nurse care managers would do a follow-up call with the patients who watched the video, after being informed by a reporting system. This approach saved nurses tedious administrative time tracking down patients and delivering lengthy over-the-phone education about their disease. Patients were better able to digest the information and formulate questions and thoughts around the topic. As a result, follow-up calls were shorter and allowed the nurse to deliver teach-back and motivational interviewing. Nurses doubled the number of patients they could follow up within a week. This simple process improvement resulted in thousands of dollars saved.

Example 2: Most organizations believe they'll achieve the most cost savings in addressing patients with chronic conditions. This is often the case. However, by tracking patient queries, one healthcare system learned its greatest consumers of services were worried mothers with children under 12. These moms and their children were one of the highest utilizers of the emergency department for the self-insured organization. Implementing an education program geared for moms and explaining care options after hours (such as the proximity of urgent care clinics or 24-hour outpatient clinics near their homes) helped reduce unnecessary emergency visits.

When done right, patient engagement programs can provide more effective ways to manage care by building trust and delivering important patient education that motivate people to take greater ownership of their care. Equally important, digital systems with robust reporting mechanisms can help uncover outcome data that can support organizations' business objectives, while cultivating a happier, healthier patient community.

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