Patient Engagement for Private Practices

A Beginner's Guide

To build a thriving practice, it is crucial that your patients take an active role in their healthcare experience. But how do you ensure patient involvement when there are so many other priorities to manage as a medical group owner?

It starts with establishing a comprehensive patient engagement strategy that not only enables you to nurture long-term relationships with your patients, but also helps to drive improved patient outcomes and greater financial stability for the practice.

According to the Advisory Board, a healthcare research firm, 58% of the 7,000 adults it surveyed said they were more interested in being proactive in their overall health and wellness since 2020.[1] A report from McKinsey revealed practices with a distinctive customer experience saw improved financial stability as a result of increased acquisition, retention, and share of engagement, as well as reduced administrative costs.[2]

The reality is that patients not only want more engagement with their healthcare provider, they need it. That's why it's so important to establish a structured patient engagement strategy that keeps patients involved throughout the healthcare experience.

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What is a
Patient Engagement Strategy?

What does a comprehensive patient engagement strategy look like? At the most basic level, it provides a structured process for healthcare providers and their staff to actively involve patients in their healthcare experience. Key components include patient communication channels, self-service tools, and automated workflows for patient messaging tactics, appointment reminders, billing, and more.

A full-scale patient engagement strategy includes effective patient engagement solutions that seamlessly integrate with your practice management and EHR platforms.

Most importantly, a patient engagement strategy is not a one-time project that you build and never to revisit again. It's on ongoing strategy that your practice refines based on your patients' individual needs and preferences.

Over time, a successful patient engagement strategy can have a massive impact on patient outcomes, as well as your practice's financial health. Here's how:

Improved patient outcomes
Patients who take an active interest in their personal health routinely experience improved outcomes. For example, a study looking into the impact of patient engagement on healthcare quality published on PubMed Central stated that, "Such engagement can lead to a reduction in the number of hospitalizations, improved effectiveness, efficiency, quality of health services, quality of life, and responsiveness." The study also cited numerous other patient engagement benefits, including increased patient awareness, greater health literacy among patient populations, and improved health outcomes.[3] Another study conducted by the University of Virginia found that patients who experienced lower engagement levels with their healthcare provider after suffering a myocardial infarction were more likely to endure multiple issues, including major medication errors, emergency department visits, and unplanned readmissions.[4]

By focusing on strategies that empower patients to take an active role in their healthcare experience, practices can help patients live their fullest life possible.

Greater practice financial stability
Private practices often see fewer no-show rates and a measurable increase in financial stability as a result of an effective and comprehensive patient engagement strategy. Because patients are more involved in the healthcare experience, they are more likely to schedule follow-up appointments, maintain treatment plans, and reach out to their healthcare provider with questions about their health. Practices with more engaged patients are also more likely to receive higher patient satisfaction scores, which lead to more referrals and a stronger reputation.

The Top 10
Patient Engagement Tools & Tactics

While every practice's patient engagement strategy should reflect their specific patient population and specialties, there are ten key components that make up a comprehensive patient engagement strategy. These components include a variety of technology solutions and tactics that enable private practices to put their patient engagement strategy into action.

1. Online reputation management

Patients are increasingly adopting a consumer approach when choosing their healthcare providers, researching physicians and practices online before making a decision and asking friends and family for referrals. Your online user reviews and ratings can significantly impact whether or not new patients will use your practice or trust you with their healthcare needs.

It is critical private practices monitor their ratings and reviews to ensure a positive reputation. Patient engagement software solutions that include reputation management tools make it easy for private practices not only to monitor their online reputation, but to take a proactive approach when it comes to how they are perceived online.

2. Patient portal

Patients are more involved in their healthcare experience when they have access to an online platform that serves as their patient portal, allowing them to manage all aspects of their care, from reviewing lab results to managing health insurance information and making payments. In fact, according to the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT, more than 60% of patients with access to a patient portal used it, at least, once over a 12-month period.[5]

By providing an easy-to-use patient portal solution, you set a foundation that allows patients to be a true partner in their healthcare experience. Instead of requiring your staff to handle an influx of daily inquiries and phone calls, patients have the ability to manage many tasks often handled by your admin team.

Best of all, an effective patient portal solution enables your practice to implement key patient engagement strategies, such as posting appointment reminders in the patient's account, giving patients the ability to message directly with their healthcare provider, and making it easier for patients to manage their medical bills.

3. Online scheduling

Patients often put off scheduling healthcare appointments because it's one more thing on their to-do list that they have to coordinate among many other priorities. Additionally, requiring patients to spend time on-hold, waiting to schedule an appointment while at work, is counter-productive to keeping patients involved in their care.

By having a self-service online scheduling tool at their disposal, patients gain more control over their healthcare experience and a sense of flexibility when managing appointments. With the right self-service online scheduling platform, that integrates with your practice management and EHR solutions, your practice can customize its self-service scheduling capabilities, enabling patients to request telehealth appointments and complete intake forms prior to their appointment.

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4. Online intake forms

Speaking of in-take forms, your patient engagement strategy should include tools that allow patients to complete all intake forms at their own convenience via a desktop, tablet or their even their mobile phone. It's especially helpful for patients who often do not have access to necessary information while sitting in your waiting room, completing a form they've been given on a clipboard.

With online intake forms, patients can easily look up medical history details, prescription lists, and other important information from the convenience of their home. By replacing paper-based intake documents with digital forms, your practice no longer has to manually enter patient data, an antiquated process that opens the door to errors and takes valuable time away from your admin teams day-to-day operations.

5. Patient messaging platform

Patient messaging is a critical component of a successful patient engagement strategy. Because patients often have questions outside of appointment times, or even office hours, offering an easy-to-use patient messaging platform has an immediate and positive impact on patient satisfaction. Private practices can leverage patient messaging platforms and channels for a number of tactics, from sending appointment reminders and follow-up information after an appointment to sharing health and well-being resources.

Messaging platforms can be integrated into the patient portal or implemented as a standalone solution. When choosing a patient messaging solution, consider platforms that offer two-way patient communication capabilities and features that allow you to track every incoming patient call, SMS message, and website lead.

Because patients may speak different languages and often prefer different messaging channels, such as email instead of texts or phone calls, a solution that allows patients to set their own preferences makes it more likely that they will read—and understand—whatever communications your office distributes.

6. Automated reminders

No-shows are having a devasting impact on private practices, costing healthcare providers thousands of dollars of year. According to a Medical Group Management Association (MGMA) survey of medical group owners, 37% report no-shows have increased this year.[6] Even worse, when a patient misses an appointment, it can have a detrimental effect on their healthcare outcomes, especially if they are managing chronic conditions.

Late arrivals can also cause bottlenecks across a practice's daily operations, leading to longer wait times for other patients and disrupted schedules for the healthcare team. But reminding patients by phone about their upcoming appointment is time consuming and error prone tactic.

Leveraging automated patient appointment reminders can help alleviate all the challenges that come with no-shows and late arrivals. By implementing a patient engagement solution, you can easily schedule automated reminders that give patients the ability to confirm their appointment or reschedule if necessary.

7. Patient recall capabilities

Patient recall capabilities within integrated practice management and patient engagement solutions allow practices to create sophisticated patient engagement initiatives. With patient recall tools, private practices can create a customizable cadence for all automated notifications, from appointment reminders and follow-ups to immunization alerts, important healthcare information, and treatment directives.

8. Online payment capabilities

The payment experience plays a key role in patient engagement and satisfaction. A PYMNTS survey found that 63% of patients will switch healthcare providers if they do not have a positive payment experience.[7] When it comes to managing medical bills, patients want a seamless experience that best fits their financial situation and offers a variety of payment options, such as credit card on file (CCOF), digital wallet payment capabilities, and payment plans. (The PYMTS survey also noted that 27% of patients are dissatisfied if their provider does not offer payment plans.)

Offering multiple payment options is integral to a comprehensive patient engagement strategy, giving patients more flexibility over their healthcare payments. When you integrate your billing capabilities into a patient portal, it increases patient satisfaction all around. It also helps accelerate patient payments which, in turn, helps fortify your practice's financial stability.

9. Patient education efforts

For many patients, navigating the healthcare experience can be a confusing and overwhelming process. Patients with multiple providers must keep up with varying treatments, office visits, and medication schedules. It's difficult enough to keep track of appointments, not to mention leaving an appointment with a solid understanding of their diagnosis, treatment options, and more.

Giving patients educational materials and resources is key to helping them stay informed. Such resources empower patients to ask questions about their treatments, long-term impacts of medical conditions, and more—all of which can help improve their quality of care, as well as their outcomes. In fact, a study published in JAMIA Open (Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association) revealed that being able to access educational resources through patient portals had a positive impact on patient outcomes.[8]

10. Patient surveys

Leveraging post-visit surveys to monitor patient satisfaction and collect feedback is one of the most valuable patient engagement tactics a private practice can implement. It gives you valuable information on the patient experience, while also providing insights on any gaps in your practice's workflow processes, allowing you to refine any operational issues that may need improving.

Automated patient surveys delivered via text or email can have a massive impact on your patient engagement strategy. You can collect patient feedback, review comments, and, if you receive positive feedback, ask the patient to rate your practice on your Google Business Profile, Yelp, or other healthcare-specific rating and review websites.

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AdvancedMD Helps Practices Improve Patient Engagement

With its unified practice management, EHR, and patient engagement platform, AdvancedMD gives private practices a full-scale, comprehensive suite of patient engagement solutions. Our patient engagement tools include a vast array of features that enable healthcare providers to improve healthcare outcomes and fortify their practice's financial stability, while building long-lasting relationships with their patients

The intuitive and integrative nature of our patient engagement solutions ensure streamlined workflow processes that drive productivity across your practice. With AdvancedMD, you can build an effective patient engagement strategy from the ground up, while continuously refining patient engagement tactics that positively impact every stage of the patient experience.

If you're ready to get started creating a comprehensive patient engagement strategy, schedule a demo now to see AdvancedMD in action.

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