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Healthcare AI, Patient engagement

Intelligent patient experiences, part 1: How easy is it to use your patient portal?

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In the first of a five-part series on applying AI-powered technology to improve patient experiences, we look at how automating patient portal support can deliver quick but significant wins for healthcare organizations—and their patients.

The quality of the overall patient experience can have a major impact on an organizations' ability to attract and retain patients, as well as a patient's participation in their care. In this series of articles, I'll explore the biggest challenges in delivering high-quality interactions and how AI-powered patient engagement solutions can help organizations overcome them. First up, let's look at one of the key sources of friction and frustration in the patient experience—using the patient portal.

The problem with patient portal support

Jane has just switched healthcare providers and has just had a great visit with her new doctor. But when she tries to follow up after the appointment, she can't find the activation details for her patient portal account. She calls the patient support line and waits, listening to hold music for over 30 minutes before hanging up in frustration. After this terrible first experience, Jane never calls back, her patient portal account stays inactive, and she starts to wonder if she's chosen the right provider.

Organizations invest in patient portals to make care management more convenient and efficient. But when patients need help accessing their account, they call patient support and are often faced with long wait times because of staffing shortages, high call volumes, or both.

Most (92%) US consumers say quick and easy access to their medical records is important.
However, nearly half also have trouble accessing medical records from their patient portal (45%) or physician's office (42%). That leads to huge volumes of inquiries that tie up support staff and increase wait

times.

The result is frustration and friction—the opposite of the convenience and efficiency patient portals should provide. What's more, a bad initial impression can cause them to give up using it for good.

Poor experiences can block a patients' motivation to engage with their healthcare providers and pursue good health—potentially leading to gaps in care and adverse outcomes. It can also have a commercial impact, reducing patient retention and damaging organizations' market reputation.

To alleviate these issues, many healthcare organizations are automating patient portal support, using AI-powered tools to provide a superior patient experience.

Improving the patient experience with conversational AI

With conversational AI solutions, organizations can automate support to handle common patient needs, such as help with portal activation, passwords, or navigation. By empowering patients to self-serve these common issues, organizations can offer a seamless patient portal experience that will create a positive impression, encourage use, and increase the business value of their investment.

For example, with an Intelligent Virtual Agent (IVA) on phone lines, NLU-powered conversational AI allows patients to simply state why they're calling in their own words, rather than getting lost in complex menu trees delivered by inferior interactive voice response (IVR) systems. The IVA understands the caller's intent and directs them to the requested self-service option or routes them to the most appropriate live agent for more complex needs. Similarly, patients at their computer can chat with an IVA to quickly receive information that quickly resolves their problem.

By automating patient support, our healthcare organization customers typically see a 40% reduction in the number of calls handled by live agents—call containment that deflects calls from humans—resulting in 47% cost savings. Automation provides a fast, frictionless, and effective experience for patients and makes live agents more readily available to handle complicated or sensitive cases that require their expertise and empathy.

Offering 24×7 access to intelligent automated support across voice and digital channels boosts patient satisfaction and portal use, helping increase patient engagement, accountability, and wellness.

Automating patient support at University Hospitals

Nuance offers first-party, turnkey applications that integrate with EHR, CRM, and telephony systems and deliver rapid business value through quick deployments and high-performance technology. By intelligently connecting automated and human-assisted support, our omnichannel conversational AI solutions enable every patient to access the help they need.

University Hospitals in Cleveland chose Nuance Patient Engagement Solutions to help increase patient portal adoption and provide frictionless access. With our AI-powered solutions, the organization can enable self-service for a range of common inquiries, from portal account access to telehealth preparation. As well as increasing portal use, this cuts down call wait times by freeing up live agents.

"Nuance's proven AI technology, its deep experience in healthcare and the strongly positive recommendations from other health systems using Nuance Patient Engagement Solutions were key considerations in our selection," says Robert Eardley, CIO at University Hospitals. "We wanted to really extend our brand experience through automated conversational AI and integrate the deployment closely with our existing electronic health record (EHR). Nuance was the partner to help us do just that. We want our patients to experience an efficient support process through the use of technologies and not be hindered by them. Together we were able to focus on providing satisfying, valuable patient experiences at every touchpoint, while enhancing our overall operational efficiency."

Next time: extending automation to appointment management

Patient portal support is an ideal place to get started with automating the patient experience, offering high business impact with minimal operational impact. In the next article in this series, I'll look at another high-value target for automation, exploring how AI can help patients manage their appointments and prescriptions themselves.

Tags: Patient experience

About Anthony Oliva, MD, D.O. MMM CPE FACPE

Dr. Anthony (Tony) Oliva, D.O. MMM CPE FACPE, is the vice president and chief medical officer for Nuance's Healthcare division. Dr. Oliva draws on more than 15 years of executive healthcare experience. As chief medical officer, he personally has been involved with the implementation and expansion of clinical documentation programs since 2004. Previously serving as chief medical officer for Borgess Health, Dr. Oliva was accountable for the clinical practice of medicine across all Borgess Health entities including ambulatory care, hospital care and extended care services. He is currently Board Certified in Family Medicine. Dr. Oliva received an MS in Medical Management from Carnegie Mellon University Heinz School of Public Policy & Management. He is a Certified Physician Executive, a designation earned from the American College of Physician Executives.

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