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Healthcare AI, Patient engagement

Intelligent patient experiences, part 3: How quickly can your patients get answers and advice?

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When patients find it difficult to get answers to questions, everyone loses—if they don't have the information they need, it can cause frustration, inefficiency, and delays. To overcome these issues, many healthcare organizations are using AI-powered tools to help patients find what they need with 24x7 convenience.

In most aspects of her life, Jane is accustomed to readily finding the information she needs to make day-to-day decisions quickly and easily. But when she contacts her healthcare provider to pay her bill, she's greeted with recited menus and must repeat her personal information and account numbers several times.

Getting answers is a slow, high-effort process, and it's a long way from the fast, intuitive, and anytime experiences Jane's used to from other organizations.

As I covered in my previous articles, high-quality patient experiences are essential for driving better care outcomes and financial performance, and there are many simple ways that technology can improve and automate routine patient engagement interactions. The next step on the patient engagement automation journey is to use AI to handle frequently asked questions, connect patients to the information they need—and even provide trusted answers to health-related questions.

Patient experiences can be frustrating and complex

When patients have questions on topics such as location amenities, organization policies, billing, or visit preparation, they typically call in and navigate a confusing maze of menu options, only to continue waiting to speak to someone. Now, imagine adding patients with medical questions to the mix—where concerns about upcoming chemotherapy are in the same queue as questions about valet parking.

It's a frustrating—and even disheartening—experience for patients that can lead them to disengage from their care or even look elsewhere for healthcare services. When Patient Access Center agents are constantly addressing simple questions instead of handling the more complex or sensitive issues meant for a human, it has a huge impact on patient experience and organizational efficiency.

Fast access to essential information with AI

These issues are leading more healthcare organizations to deploy Intelligent Virtual Agents (IVAs) on phone and digital channels. IVAs, powered by natural language understanding (NLU) technology, allow patients to state their needs in their own words and get fast answers to their questions, rather than navigating the menu maze or fruitlessly searching on the organization's website.

Instead of waiting in line listening to hold music, patients can get immediate answers to common inquiries directly from the IVA or be sent links by SMS to access the information they need. With AI-powered self-service, it's much faster and easier for patients to find answers to basic questions. And when patients are empowered to help themselves—however they choose (make a call, go online), whenever they choose—there are significant positive impacts for healthcare organizations.

Greater efficiency and cost savings

As more patient inquiries are handled with automated self-service, the Patient Access Center sees much lower call volumes, freeing agents to focus on more involved cases or be reassigned to other, more valuable duties. Care teams stop spending time answering routine questions or assisting patients with non-healthcare-related questions.

Of course, in healthcare, there are many occasions when speaking to a live agent or care team member will be necessary. That's why the most advanced IVA solutions offer contextual transfer, giving agents information about the caller and their activity history, and providing recommended responses during the agent-patient conversation.

Increasing self-service with AI-powered technology

Increasingly, IVAs can even help patients get evidence-based answers to common health questions, using a natural language processing tool to gather trusted information from vetted resources and deliver answers in conversational interactions and respond in plain speak.

Nuance Patient Engagement Solutions customers are already seeing an average 40% call containment. Now, we're working alongside our Microsoft colleagues to combine advanced generative AI with our conversational AI to expand the breadth of inquiries that can be addressed through self-service. Our goal is to improve patient experiences even further and give healthcare organizations the tools to overcome staffing challenges, protect their bottom line, and boost their reputation.

Next time… How easy is it for your clinicians to manage their patients' care?

In the next installment of this five-part series, I'll look at how AI can help automate patient communications and care management to increase patient engagement and reduce manual effort for clinical and support staff.

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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