Technology That Improves Physician-Patient Relations

By Zach Watson [4]

Struggling to find the time to build great relationships with your patients? Here’s how technology can help.

**Source:** Physicians Practice

Given the rapid expansion of the technology lexicon in the healthcare industry over the last several years, it would be easy to develop a certain resistance to ideas that require their own acronym. While it’s true that patient relationship management (PRM) falls into that category, healthcare professionals would be mistaken to glaze over the concept.

While patient engagement, patient activation, and other terms have become quite popular, PRM neatly encompasses these concepts while borrowing from a proven methodology used in other industries, customer relationship management (CRM).

As medical software moves from hyperbole to practical applications, PRM will become a central tenet of the most important aspect of all: the physician-patient relationship.

**Where Patient Relationship Management Originates**

PRM shares a number of characteristics with customer relationship management, a methodology that’s been employed by a number of service sector companies for several decades. CRM posits that in order to attract and retain customers, an organization must provide relevant, timely, and above all helpful service in every interaction with the customer.

Patient relationship management borrows from CRM in its goal to provide excellent service that’s targeted toward the individual needs of the patient every time she interacts with her physician. Where PRM differs is in the stakes: a storied business relationship can last a decade or more, while a relationship between a doctor and a patient can last three or four times that long.

**The Practical Side of PRM**

As the majority of the healthcare world knows, the nature of the physician-patient relationship is changing. Doctors are under pressure to meet specific quality measures, see a greater number of patients, and in the case of the independent physician or practice, run a profitable business. Consequently, the type of quality interaction that both parties seek is becoming a rare occasion. Communication becomes stretched and patients begin to feel aggrieved. Meanwhile physicians dream of manageable workloads.

It’s in this circumstance that patient relationship management leans heavily on technology to provide value. By automating a number of administrative, marketing, and communication tasks, PRM software can help physicians and their staff become more efficient while building better relationships with patients.

**Let’s examine some of PRM’s most prominent features and use cases:**

**Communication**

With a growing number of patients comes a greater strain on the practice’s ability to communicate with them. For example, over half of patients report no follow up from their physician after an appointment. Obviously this isn’t driven by apathy, but rather by lack of resources.

By sending patients automated follow up e-mails, PRM software can make sure the patient feels valued after he has left the practice while eliminating the need to author the same basic e-mail for each patient.

PRM software, such as Solutionreach, allows practices to e-mail patients who couldn’t book an appointment and are waiting for cancelations. Since the system does scheduling as well, it knows as soon as an appointment is canceled and automatically e-mails the next patient on the list until an appointment is booked.

This type of software may also enable your practice to send appointment reminders to patients when their appointment is approaching or if they’ve missed a scheduled check-in.

**Education**

Distributing educational information plays a critical role in helping patients comply with their treatment plan. But without sophisticated e-mail technology, getting the right information to the
right patients can be a challenge. PRM software makes this ostensibly complex process simple. By adding patients to different e-mail lists by condition or diagnosis, providers can easily distribute the educational information their patients need. If the lists are symptom specific, patients with multiple chronic conditions can be on multiple lists.

**Coordination**
The rise of [Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs)](http://www.physicianspractice.com/blog) and Patient Centered Medical Homes (PCMH) doesn’t just add to healthcare’s acronym count; it also emphasizes the need for increased coordination throughout the system. Ensuring that patients have a successful handoff to informed physicians means this aspect of care also falls under patient relationship management. Here the functionality of the software differs between products. Cloud-based software Updox acts as the [direct messaging provider](http://www.physicianspractice.com/blog) for a number of EHRs. Using this technology, or something else like it, can provide a solution to the problem of exchanging data between disparate EHR systems. Meanwhile other PRM tools, such as Healthloop, put a specific focus on making sure patient handoffs include a comprehensive exchange of information.

The PRM world is still developing, but will eventually take its place as an essential piece of any doctor-patient relationship. Practices will spend less time on repetitive tasks while patients will receive better information from their providers. PRM isn’t an all-encompassing solution; rather it’s a sensible communication tool for healthcare.

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