



Enhancing the consumer experience through a digital front door and digital practice

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Introduction

Healthcare has been moving to a more digital, streamlined experience from patient registration through clinical care and final bill payment. The transition from manual, retroactive processes to digital experiences to bolster clinician and consumer engagement has been slow for many organizations.

Consumers have long complained about the limitations of clinician offices, including lack of self-service options, complicated medical bills, limited engagement before service and patient payment options.¹

Research from Forrester has shown this overall lack of digital tools has prompted up to 40% of consumers to change healthcare providers to gain access to health management services.²

Barriers, including technology implementation costs, limited reimbursement and lack of clinician buy-in, have stymied this much-needed advancement to the healthcare practice. These obstacles proved especially problematic during a period of unprecedented change caused by a novel public health crisis. As a result, the pandemic has forced organizations to evolve rapidly in this space.

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Whereas **11% of patients** accessed healthcare virtually or through telehealth in 2019, now **three-quarters of patients** are using technology for healthcare access.³

Current healthcare consumer engagement landscape

With the emergence of COVID-19, healthcare organizations flipped the way they have previously delivered care on its head to maintain access to high-quality, affordable care when communities shut down to help slow the spread of the contagious virus.

For many clinicians, this meant delivering enhanced care digitally, using everything from telehealth for patient visits and patient portals for socially distanced registration, patient intake, communications and new contactless forms of bill payment.

And for patients, the new normal has created a whole new healthcare experience. Whereas 11% of patients accessed healthcare virtually or through telehealth in 2019, now three-quarters of patients are using technology for healthcare access.³

Regulatory flexibilities – like payment parity for telehealth services and no patient copays for certain coronavirus-related services – have supported the transition to a more digital healthcare practice, at least during the pandemic.

Many of these flexibilities from public and private payers are, or will, expire with the COVID-19 public health

emergency, as stated by law or payer policy. However, the digital consumer experience will not sunset like these policies and regulations.

Now that the digital consumer experience has been turned on, many clinicians – and their patients – are finding they cannot, or are unwilling to, simply turn it back off.

Clinicians and patients have overwhelmingly welcomed telehealth and other virtual care options, for example. In fact, of the nearly three-quarters of patients recently surveyed by Wakefield Research who had accessed their first-ever telehealth visit during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, most of them reported high patient satisfaction with the experience.⁴

About 83% of patients in a separate survey also said they anticipate using telehealth beyond the pandemic.⁵ That same level of satisfaction is also applying to other digital clinician-patient communication tools, underscoring a cultural shift around healthcare technology.⁶

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Similarly, clinicians are satisfied with telehealth and almost 70% are motivated to use more telehealth services because of the experience they have had during the pandemic.⁷

Clinicians and consumers have also realized in the past year other key components of the digital consumer experience (e.g., financial experience) are also possible through technology. Healthcare organizations, for example, have complied with new price transparency rules from the federal government, and many have gone above and beyond the rule to help deliver personalized cost estimates to consumers, even before they show up for a service.

The use of healthcare technology to offer a more digital encounter has finally aligned clinician and consumer experiences, creating a major opportunity for healthcare organizations to help meet consumer desires for a convenient experience without sacrificing clinician satisfaction and well-being.

Additionally, leveraging new digital capabilities (e.g., telehealth and patient portals for enhanced consumer communication) could be essential tools for addressing new challenges. By enabling clinicians to have advanced access to these tools, they can be better equipped to

address worsening conditions from pandemic-related care delays and long-standing healthcare disparities.⁸

The importance of the digital front door in the modern era of consumerism

Clinical staff have their hands on the knob of the digital front door that consumers have always wanted. They now need to push the door open by refining digital health capabilities for a post-pandemic, consumer-like healthcare environment, empowering consumers to have the digital health literacy needed to meaningfully engage with new care, preventative care and administrative options.

Healthcare organizations must also learn from experience. Early patient portals and forms of consumer engagement tools barely scratched the surface of technology's potential to meet the changing expectations of consumers.

“Meaningful Use drove the initial development of these patient portals and consumer engagement capabilities but focused primarily on record access and only secondarily on opportunities around scheduling and filling out forms,” says David Harse, vice president and general manager, consumer and patient engagement at Cerner. “Many of these limitations were the result of the technology being tethered to the underlying electronic health record (EHR) used by a health system. In many ways, it became a check-the-box.”



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David Harse
Vice President and General Manager
Consumer and Patient Engagement
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“The front door represents everything from awareness and access to ultimately engagement. The front door also includes all the steps to facilitate an appointment happening, being effective and leading to the timely payment of copays and claims.”

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Consumer and Patient Engagement
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Consumers now expect more due to the evolution of consumer-facing technologies. The digital front door must now engage consumers throughout their health journey, encompassing a healthcare organization’s entire network and interacting with numerous EHRs and health IT systems to help solve unique business needs. “Today is about creating a unified ecosystem wherein organizations seek to bring together their mall of apps and enable a single brand strategy. The goal is to unify the experience for consumers in more meaningful ways,” adds Harse.

The digital front door can mean many things and take on various forms. But to be truly effective, a digital front door must serve the needs of clinicians and consumers alike.

“We look at the digital front door as the primary access point for people to find healthcare, understand options and be guided to the right interaction mode – whether it’s virtual, asynchronous or in-person,” Harse explains. “The front door represents everything from awareness and access to ultimately engagement. The front door also includes all the steps to facilitate an appointment happening, being effective and leading to the timely payment of copays and claims.”

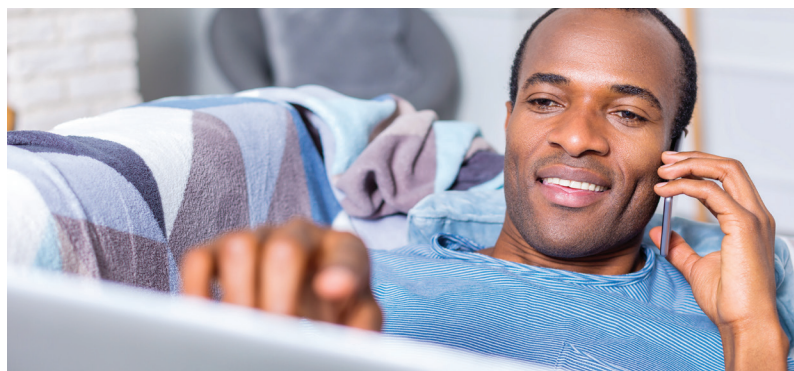
Digital front doors are designed to help:

- *Enhance consumer awareness and acquisition*
- *Streamline scheduling and conversion*
 - Find a clinician and care
 - Access pre-care guidance
- *Optimize financial clearance*
 - Provide understanding to financial responsibility
 - Simplify prepay bills/copay

The COVID-19 pandemic has proven to be a catalyst for rapid change to consumer engagement among healthcare

organizations unable to provide numerous services due to lockdowns.

“I feel COVID-19 has accelerated digital innovation by five to ten years in many respects. It has created tremendous importance on aiding how these digital systems are not only convenient and effective for the consumer, but also the organizations trying to use them to conduct business,” Harse maintains.



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Defining a digital practice and how it can impact the patient experience

The digital front door is the entryway into a healthcare organization, and it can prove even more impactful when complemented by a digital practice. With advanced technologies, healthcare organizations can provide care to patients in new and engaging ways outside of in-person visits.

“A digital practice comprises the electronic capabilities and experiences needed to engage patients along their health journey based on their care plan,” Harse notes. “It can be as simple as a child’s sick visit that necessitates a prescription and follow-up care to as complex as chronic condition management and the need for longitudinal care over a person’s lifetime. A digital practice helps the patient tie together their diagnoses, treatments and next steps.”

Key aspects of a digital practice:

- *Patient intake and arrival*
 - Clinical consent
 - Data reconciliation
- *Care episodes*
 - Pre- and post-appointment guidance
 - Digital therapeutics
 - Preventative care outreach
- *Follow-up and self-management*
 - Clinical communications
 - Educational content
 - Automated appointment check-ins
- *Outreach*
 - Targeted communications
 - Automated content

Even after the current pandemic, virtual care will remain an important facet of the digital practice, as well as the ability of clinicians to monitor patients in their homes to support timely interventions as needed.

For instance, a visit takes place either in near real-time or asynchronously and leads to the development of a care plan containing a patient to-do list of short- and long-term actions based on a data-driven approach powered by devices, as well as the information generated during the encounter. A digital practice is successful when its reach extends beyond its four walls to engage patients where they live and provide the information necessary for preparing for follow-up care and appointments. “It all comes down to bringing those interactions and data insights to bear on the patient’s health and well-being, whether it’s an acute episode or chronic condition,” adds Harse.

At its most impactful, the digital practice shifts the focus from episodic to longitudinal care, from sickness to well-being, in the name of prevention. The key to prevention is empowering patients with proper education and other resources to take ownership of their health.

“The concept of preventive care is ultimately something about which the patient should care most. The patient is the single person who has the most at stake in the clinical outcome. More so than the clinician or nurse, the IT company — ultimately, it’s them. We talk about gaps in

care in our industry, but we haven’t directly made that data available to the patient,” says David Bradshaw, senior vice president, consumer and employer solutions at Cerner.

“We all joke about how Jiffy Lube can text you when it’s time to get your oil changed, but when it’s time to get your mammogram or your colonoscopy, it’s like crickets from the healthcare system,” he continues. “That’s what we’re working to change. That’s where we’re exposing these preventative care measures to the patient and empowering them to act.”

Central to the success of a digital practice is its role in providing a single source of truth that enables effective care coordination among clinicians, as well as between clinicians and patients.

“A digital practice provides the definitive source of truth. It connects to the provider, care manager, patient and nurse. It has the potential to reduce so much of the friction about which people complain in their healthcare experiences,” Bradshaw advises. “What’s more, it would truly empower patients to take on their own tasks. They should be managing those tasks as much as clinicians and technology developers do to provide the accountability necessary for improving overall care.”

If the main goal of a digital practice is prevention, all stakeholders must buy-in and act upon data-driven intelligence. Organizations also need to align on providing quality data that can be shared across disparate systems to help take the longitudinal record to the next level.

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Inspira Health: connecting the digital front door to the digital practice

Headquartered in New Jersey, Inspira Health is a non-profit healthcare organization operating three hospitals, two emergency rooms and several multispecialty health centers among other locations in Gloucester, Cumberland, Salem and Camden counties. Inspira is also a regional leader in physician training, with around 160 medical residents and fellows across ten nationally accredited specialty programs.

Prior to the pandemic, the New Jersey health system relied on its website and mobile application to engage patients and consumers, with the goal of raising awareness of Inspira's services and improving how people access them. According to Tom Pacek, CPHIMS, vice president and chief information officer at Inspira Health, that all changed as soon as the pandemic began to take its toll on the region.

"Throughout the pandemic, telehealth has become extremely important in the ambulatory space, such as primary care, urgent care, specialty care and behavioral health," he relates. "While telehealth on-demand access is available in the MyInspira App, most scheduled telehealth appointments are made by phone or through our website. Likewise, push notifications have become heavily used to deliver COVID-19 test results to our patients."

Inspira also extended its digital range to patients' homes in novel ways to balance in-hospital demand for COVID-19 care.

"Remote patient monitoring utilization and acceptance increased tenfold compared to pre-pandemic utilization," Pacek reveals. "We capitalized on sending people home early from the hospital to make room for more acute patients. Patients finished their COVID-19 recovery from

the comfort of their homes or skilled nursing facilities with remote monitoring using, for example, a blood pressure cuff, pulse oximeter or thermometer. During one surge, we reduced admissions from the emergency room by discharging them with remote monitoring instead of admitting them to an inpatient bed."

Digital front door and practice offerings at Inspira:

- Clinician locator
- Find care now
- Services finder
- COVID-19 assessment
- Patient portal access
- Appointment request
- Appointment scheduling
- Telehealth on-demand
- Classes and events
- Bill pay
- Indoor navigation
- Healthcare concierge
- Retail pharmacy
- Health actions

For Inspira Health and Pacek, their main goal with making these specific features available was threefold: awareness, ease of access to services and patient retention.

In particular, the digital front door became the means for meeting consumers where they were and how they wished to receive information and services. "It is critical to create a convenience factor when it comes to the consumer's health and well-being," Pacek adds.

Through the assistance of marketing campaigns, Inspira Health can highlight different features along with digital signage in public areas and brochures at access points.

Through the organization's transformation from a traditional to digital practice, stakeholders have come to realize the importance of communication along with the types of communication opportunities that should be made available.

"We have an omnichannel approach that includes 1-800-Inspira to speak with a live person to give access

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*Vice President and Chief Information Officer,
Inspira Health*

to the same information and services as our website and app,” Pacek observes. “We do point out the benefits of the digital solutions, like faster access to test results, self-scheduling appointments 24/7 and pushing forms to patients to complete prior to their appointments to help minimize or even eliminate the waiting room.”

The notion of pushing information is vitality important to Pacek and Inspira Health.

“While the patient portal will continue to store the patients’ clinical information and preferences, we will drive information to the patient using the mode and frequency they want it. For example, with an email, text or phone call.” Pacek states.

And the organization has plans for becoming more proactive and personalized with its marketing campaigns to educate consumers about the value of information and technology. “We will utilize artificial intelligence and machine learning to identify consumers’ needs even before they realize they have the needs. We want to become proactive with our approach to care, helping people

become healthier and stay well,” adds Pacek.

Beyond the pandemic, Inspira Health is well-positioned to keep up with the demand for virtual, hybrid and in-person care and leverage the capabilities of its digital ecosystem to the needs of consumers today, tomorrow and in the future.

A person’s unique health comprises health visits, environment, genetics and determinants of health, which altogether dictate how a person interacts with the healthcare organization. The digital front door is designed to help limit confusion associated with access to care and services, along with providing the education necessary to help improve any number of conditions. When combined with a digital practice, clinicians can help streamline the person’s journey from sickness to prevention in a way designed to help build trust between consumers and healthcare organizations and lead to patient retention and improvements in health outcomes.

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