

TRIPLE PLAY PATIENT PLEASER

for 2021



Rising patient expectations and consumerism – already significant trends prior to 2020 – have gotten a second wind through the protracted pandemic recovery. Driven by escalating out-of-pocket costs and continued job and insurance losses, patients are pushing providers on patient engagement and patient satisfaction measures like never before.

A recent MGMA survey¹ identified the most demanded options for improving the patient experience. Three issues rose to the top, with 54% of practices surveyed confirming plans to implement one or more of these initiatives during 2021:

- ✦ Telemedicine
- ✦ Contactless payment
- ✦ Payment plans

Patients are moving beyond the more forgiving early pandemic stop-gap approach to virtual visits, and now expect a more complete digital office experience. Focusing early on this ‘triple-play’ of patient-pleasing initiatives will help your practice stay ahead of the tide-change that could otherwise wash patients out of your practice in favor of more digitally attuned offices. Timely, focused efforts will help keep current patients happy and committed, avoiding the inevitable higher cost of new patient acquisition.

PATIENT PLEASING TRIPLE PLAY

While telemedicine isn’t a new topic for most practices, fine-tuning various aspects of the experience, particularly in concert with the overall virtual patient visit, can help put the sparkle on your approach that will keep patients happy and committed.

The financial side of the equation is one that many practices are much less adept and forward-thinking about. While many other aspects of the clinic experience are measured and reported in excruciating detail, the final step in the visit process – payment – is often overlooked.

“While practices may not always measure patient satisfaction based on the financial experience, our patients do,” noted Jan Oldenburg, consumer health information strategist and patient engagement specialist, Participatory Health Consulting, speaking at the 2020 Medical Practice Excellence Conference.



¹ <https://www.mgma.com/data/data-stories/what-medical-practices-are-adding-in-2021-to-impro>

TELEMEDICINE

Propelled by the demand for safe patient interactions during the pandemic, telemedicine visits grew from less than 1% of visits going into 2020, peaked at 38% and leveled off at roughly 15% by the end of that year².



As patients and doctors continue to realize the benefits of virtual care, that percentage is expected to continue to grow, with some experts estimating that up to 50% of all visits could be provided through technology.

Many resources are available for practices who haven't yet fully embraced telemedicine. We refer you to references such as [Telemedicine Bible for Creating Great Patient Experiences](#) as a great foundation.

For practices now in the thick of telemedicine, the next step is to focus on the fine-tuning adjustments that can improve the patient-pleasing component of a virtual visit. Here five things top performing practices implement:

AWARENESS OF TECHNOLOGY ACCESS.

Adequate broadband bandwidth is a prerequisite for a fulfilling virtual visit. While fast broadband is now generally available, experts estimate that up to 42 million people in the U.S. still don't have access to broadband connectivity. Affordability is also a challenge for many, even in areas where broadband is available.

Savvy practices are sensitive to these issues when scheduling visits, particularly in areas known to have spotty coverage or when dealing with populations who may be challenged to find and afford a fast connection. Prepare a checklist of alternatives to address these challenges, such as checking with family, friends, or community resources for connectivity, or offering an audio-only alternative.

COMFORT WITH TECHNOLOGY.

Patients' capability in dealing with online technology can vary widely, impacting the quality of the interaction – or even preventing it. Be sensitive to various levels of ability, and don't make the age category mistake. Experience has shown that many senior citizens are quite technologically adept, while many younger people can struggle.

It's important that your telemedicine software platform is simple, intuitive and flexible for both patient and provider. Starting, stopping and navigating the experience should be easy to explain and understand.

PRIVACY ISSUES.

Because a patient isn't physically in the room, it's easy to become lax about the physical location of the call. Just as in a live encounter, on the provider's end the call should be conducted in privacy where conversations won't be overheard or interrupted.

Also be aware of sensitive information that may be visible on-screen. Files, notes and other confidential information must not be left where it might be seen by a patient on the next call.

SURROUNDINGS.

As a provider, be aware of how you will be viewed on the other end of the broadcast. Think of it as being on stage or on screen each time you go online. Beware of distracting backgrounds or objects in view. Check that lighting is optimized and not glaring, backlit or dull in a way that will detract from the interaction.

Your attire should also be professional and engender trust and confidence. Dress as you would for in-person meetings – at least from the waist up!

WORKFLOW ADJUSTMENTS.

This is one that has taken many practices by surprise. While much of what you do online will fit in-office workflows, much will not, and will need to be redesigned. Work through each aspect of the encounter from the patient's view through the screen and make changes that will accommodate a smooth and productive experience. [This on-demand webinar recording](#) with Elizabeth Woodcock is another great resource for fine-tuning your workflow and RCM for telemedicine.

² https://hbr.org/2020/12/what-patients-like-and-dislike-about-telemedicine?utm_campaign=hbr&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter

³ <https://broadbandnow.com/research/fcc-underestimates-unserved-by-50-percent>



CONTACTLESS PAYMENT

Telehealth is just one piece of the complete digital healthcare office experience patients are increasingly expecting. Payment trends in the broader market are spilling over into healthcare, affecting the way patients prefer to pay for doctor visits.

For example, a recent survey by Mastercard revealed that 82% of consumers consider contactless payments a cleaner way to pay, and 51% responded they are using cash less often or not at all.

Payment workflows and technologies in the practice may need major adjustments for handling payment for services, co-pays and patient-portion amounts in the absence of passing physical currency, checks or staff-assisted credit card processing.

The key? Giving patients the greatest number of low-resistance payment paths possible. This will increase satisfaction and probability that they will pay when requested.

Leading practices are finding these factors make the biggest difference:

MULTIPLE OPTIONS.

Provide as many payment options as possible. Simplified processing of credit and debit cards is the starting point. Make sure your processor supports a full array of leading credit card providers, not just “the big two.” Other payment options include PayPal, ApplePay and even Venmo.

CREDIT CARD ON FILE.

Invite patients scheduled for recurring or multiple virtual visits to provide a credit card number to be kept on file that can be used for each visit. This streamlines the payment process and increases on-time payment performance.

SIMPLE ONLINE PAYMENT CAPABILITY.

For settling outstanding bills and other between-visit payments, an online patient payment portal should be easy to access and use. Integrate it with online billing statements so patients can clearly see amounts due.

AUTOMATED PAYMENT REMINDERS.

Many leading practice management technologies are able to send email and text reminders to patients. Compared to paper statements, these electronic reminders feature links straight to a payment portal where patients can access all relevant information and make payments.

PAYMENT PLANS

Many patients are feeling increased financial pressure as the pandemic continues to impact jobs, pay and benefits.

They go to their physician for relief from the pain and stress of infirmity yet come away with sticker shock and payment woes as out-of-pocket costs continue to rise.

Part of a patient's feeling well cared for is tied to their ability to pay for services rendered. Providing expanded payment plan options helps them feel their provider cares about their future, is on their team, and is willing to work with them in a way that is beneficial to both them and the practice.

Find the balance between offering additional options that will improve patients' ability to pay, and overly complicating the process with too many choices and programs to track. Here are a few of the more successful options:

STANDARD INSTALLMENT PLAN.

Payments and term within preset ranges.

CUSTOMIZED INSTALLMENT PLAN.

Additional options for lower payments or longer payback with corresponding interest rate adjustments.

CONSOLIDATION PLAN.

For patients with multiple stressed bills or family member expenses with the practice, offer to consolidate all outstanding bills into one payment plan that can be sized to their specific ability to pay.

CASH PAYMENT BONUS.

Offer additional discount for earlier cash payment. This often saves additional risk of carrying the outstanding balance and collection costs and benefits the patient with clearing a debt at a reduced cost.

RECURRING PAYMENT PLAN.

For patients who experience recurring visits for long-term conditions, a recurring monthly payment can help them plan for and manage ongoing costs expected each month.

With plans in place, keep an eye on key indicators of utility and satisfaction and adjust as necessary.

Specific things to watch include:

- Popularity of specific plans across the patient population.
- Financial performance of each plan, including missed payments, balances paid in full and bad debt write-offs.
- Number of billing inquiries tied to payment plan confusion.
- Number of payment-related complaints and grievances received. This can include direct conversations with billing or front office staff, as well as comments and ratings on social media platforms.

TRIPLE PLAY PLEASER, ONE PLAY AT A TIME

Your practice is no doubt juggling many balls currently, exacerbated by an ongoing foggy future. But steady progress toward fine-tuning the patient experience will build loyalty and longevity in patients who are looking to not only be better served but need an extra helping of feeling valued and well cared for in stressful times.

Making improvements one step at a time will empower your practice with triple play power that can benefit everyone in your care delivery world.

AdvancedMD offers these triple play technologies in a unified bundle as part of our comprehensive [medical office software solution](#). Learn more about telemedicine with self-service scheduling, the convenience of an online payment portal and fast electronic payments from patients. You are able to tap into a new revenue stream and gain flexibility with virtual visits, leverage automate bill-pay reminders, provide online statements and set up convenient payment plans. Learn how to increase revenue and collections by contacting us today.

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