Healthcare Consumerism:

**Why healthcare practices need to adopt
a consumer-first mindset to accommodate
today's patients**

Health iPASS

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In Today's Economy, With Everyday Costs Constantly Growing, Consumers Are No Doubt Feeling The Pinch.

When it comes to care, rising out-of-pocket healthcare costs and higher patient responsibility are becoming more and more common, extending the sense of financial burden to healthcare as well. According to the InstaMed Trends in Healthcare Payments Annual Report, the average patient responsibility has increased by 30 percent over the last five years. As out-of-pocket costs continue to grow, it's not a surprise that patients are taking more stock in their own healthcare financials.

In late 2021, Forbes posed the question, "Is the era of healthcare consumerism finally here?" Many would say that the answer is a definite yes. With healthcare costs on the rise, consumers are increasingly expecting greater value. Similar to other industries, expectations usually correlate to money spent. Because of this, patients are increasingly starting to feel more like retail consumers.

Modern services like online shopping and food delivery have taken off in the last decade. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when in-person shopping became impossible at times, services like deliveries from Amazon and drive-up shopping from Target thrived. Just like these online shopping and delivery services, patients expect a streamlined experience when it comes to healthcare. And it's not just about convenience. The best retail and consumer goods companies offer top notch customer service too.

The most successful consumer brands take a customer-first approach. In the case of Nordstrom, they hang their hat on their customer service. Many would say that's the reason they've been in business for over 100 years. The most innovative brands like Apple know that customers crave cutting-edge technology and a digital-first experience.

These brands succeed at adapting quickly, to accommodate customer preferences. In today's world, medical practices need to take a retail-like, consumer-centric approach to the overall patient experience, similar to that of Nordstrom or Apple.

The New Healthcare Consumer

Modern patients play an increasingly important role in their own healthcare. Similar to researching a new home appliance, consumers are shopping around for their medical and wellness care. Today's tech-savvy patient scours the internet for reviews before making an appointment, does not hesitate to get a second opinion from an additional provider, and is likely to share their experience online. They expect transparent communication and top-notch customer service, from the moment they book their appointment until the final medical bill is paid. From the front desk associate greeting them before an appointment to the physician's bedside manner, they want to be treated like a VIP (Very Important Patient). Patients value convenience, whether that be the ability to book an appointment online or an option for telehealth services. And the convenience factor also expands to their billing experience.

Flexible payment options like payment plans and mobile wallets are valued and necessary. While these services are relatively new, they have come to be expected, as part of the streamlined patient experience they look for.

Meeting Consumers Where They Are

In our digital economy, payment processing plays an ever-increasing role in the overall financial health of healthcare organizations. As purse strings tighten due to factors like the economy and the rising costs of consumer goods, consumers are taking a harder look at their overall spending. Because of this, it becomes more important for healthcare practices to place more of a focus on collecting at the time of service. This is where eligibility services come into play. If a patient receives an accurate picture of their financial responsibility, they are more likely to pay.

When it comes to collecting patient payments, it goes beyond the ability to simply process credit card transactions. Today's patients desire flexibility and convenience. Features like the ability to accept Apple Pay or card-on-file functionality cover a wide range of patient payment preferences. Adoption of "virtual wallets" has been gaining in popularity. A recent PYMNTS/ ACI Worldwide collaborative study, The Mobile Wallet Challenge: Replacing Physical With Digital, found that "nearly half of surveyed consumers have used the method to pay for at least one of their bills within the previous 12 months."


Healthcare consumers want to pay their way, on their time. When a payment process is too complex or fragmented, it can turn patients away. Adapting to meet preferences can make the healthcare checkout process as efficient and easy as possible.

To stay ahead of the curve, practices need to adopt automation and accept various patient payment methods at checkout. Effective payment processing solutions offer real-time eligibility verification and accurate estimation of patient responsibility at the point of care. This enables healthcare offices to collect payments more efficiently, reducing the risk of unpaid bills and improving overall revenue cycle management.

Placing The Focus On Customer Service

As high deductible plans become the norm and out-of-pocket costs continue to rise, patients are expecting more "bang for their buck." In order to make each patient feel like a VIP, providers need to up their patient experience. Ways to do this could be as simple as an auto-filled first name in an appointment reminder, or as elaborate as customized pricing models for different segments. Strategies will vary based on practice demographics, but personalized service goes a long way. What strategies can medical practitioners incorporate to get it right in the minds of their patients?

Online scheduling and automated check-in functions are a start. Today's consumers also like to be heard. Sending automated requests for post-appointment feedback can elicit public reviews. People research more than ever, and it's not uncommon to choose a provider based solely on their reviews. A bad rating can deter repeat visits. This means that offering online reviews is a must.
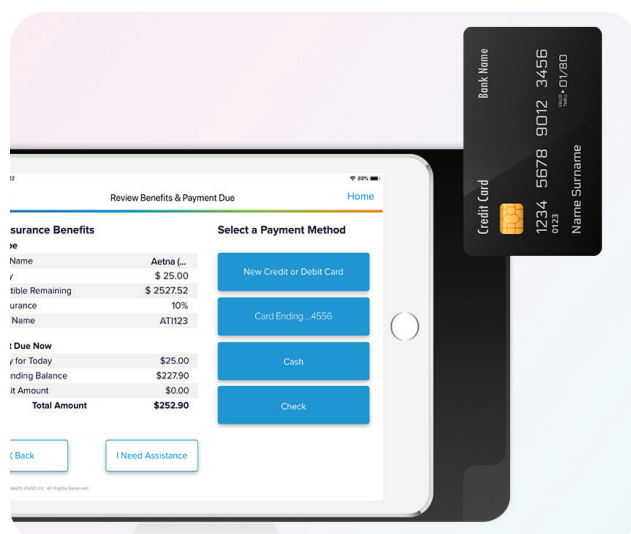
Another focal point that matters to patients is security. When making healthcare payments, approximately 74 percent of patients consider data security a top concern, according to InstaMed Trends in Healthcare Payments Annual Report. With this factoring into financial decisions, it would be unwise for providers to skimp on security. Secure payment portals are a necessity, as healthcare data breaches cost affected organizations an average of $429 per stolen record (IBM Security).

Healthcare consumers are craving efficient and cost-effective methods. Making it as easy to pay as possible is the best route for providers to not only secure optimal reimbursement, but increase the odds for a positive patient experience. When digital methods are not optimized and incorporated into patient payment options, the convenience factor suffers. By utilizing secure and fast methods, financial outcomes can improve for providers, while satisfying patient experience and demands.

Looking Ahead At The Patient Experience

To elicit collections and best serve patients, practices need to offer flexibility, while making patient payment collection as turnkey as possible. Physicians, healthcare leaders, front desk, staff members, and more need to work in unison to enhance the patient experience. Growing self-pay populations and more demanding patients are changing the healthcare landscape. Mindsets have to pivot.

The patient should no longer be thought of as just a patient, but more so as a valued consumer.

Looking For The Easiest Way For Your Patients To Pay?

Health iPASS makes merchant processing simple, as the economical choice for transparent pricing and seamless integration.

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