Motivating Patients for Improved Self-Care

Abstract

In the rapidly changing healthcare landscape, patient engagement has been receiving increasing attention. With easy access to healthcare technology and improved awareness, patients themselves can now actively monitor their health. However, data associated with patients' adherence and healthcare outcomes is not very encouraging. Statistics indicate that healthcare payers and providers need to actively engage with patients, constantly motivating them to adhere to prescribed regimens and medication, and manage their health better.

A recent study by the IMS Institute for Healthcare Informatics mentions the presence of over 165,000 mHealth apps in the Apple iTunes and the Android app stores. In the iTunes store itself, there are over 90,000 apps.[2] However, 80% mobile health applications are often abandoned after two weeks of use.[3]

Renewed Focus on Patient Engagement

Although innovations in medical science and care delivery have witnessed rapid growth in the last century, there has been no corresponding decline in chronic diseases. Governments, patients, providers, and payers are all under constant pressure to improve health outcomes and reduce the cost of care.

A major issue is that, on average, people with chronic diseases take only 50% of the prescribed doses of medication, 50% patients do not follow referral advice, and 75% do not keep follow-up appointments.[1]

Increasing Engagement with Interactive Technology

Healthcare technology today generally focuses on being informative rather than interactive. Informing patients on what to eat or reminding them about the need to exercise is not very different from the erstwhile 'follow the doctor's orders' paradigm.

To engage with patients effectively, technology needs to be more interactive, accounting for factors that motivate patients. Although rewards have not resulted in an appreciable difference in patients' use of applications, gamification is gradually gaining attention.

Applications that extend to include the patients' family or support system can help improve outcomes. For instance, an application may be used to send a notice to the patient's spouse or children if an appointment is missed or cancelled, or a lab study is a concern. If the application is connected to a sensor or device, the patient can directly interact with the care team based on specific symptoms or information.

Another consideration is to use technology for patient 'visits'. This technology has very specific pertinence for homebound patients and may also extend to those in rural areas. These e-visits are, in some situations, reimbursed.

Integrating Care for Improved Outcomes

Patients today are empowered with the tools, devices, and information to manage their own health conveniently, in the comfort of their own home. Although home monitoring options have existed for years, the availability of new clinical wearables and connectivity solutions has disrupted the current landscape. These devices are easier to use and have greater ability to transfer and provide access to patient data.

Smart phones and tablets, an integral part of people's lives, can serve as a tool for tele-health, as well as a hub for clinical patient information. They make the implementation of virtual care much easier, offering patients cost-effective solutions for proactive health management. An engaged and informed patient is more likely to take ownership of his or her health and work closely with doctors and caregivers.

Collaboration also gives clinicians access to more actionable patient data, enabling relevant care while increasing the quality and accuracy of the patient health record. By combining patient, clinical, and diagnostic data, healthcare stakeholders can gain a more diversified data set, changing the way they view health data and potential treatments.

Technology developed to enhance patient engagement needs to consider healthcare as a relational science and art, not just transactional. This includes before, during, and after-care, with appropriate applications providing a continuous engagement system.

A team approach that involves a variety of licensed healthcare professionals in patient care is essential. Decision-support tools for identification of patient needs will assist the care team to focus on specific patients and their specific needs. Applications and strategies to personalize patient experience are key to effective engagement.

With healthcare stakeholders switching between multiple devices, interoperability among different technologies is essential, helping measure success outcomes for both patients and providers. This calls for close interaction between developers and subject matter experts. The diverse demand for systems support is challenging but achievable.

Public health organizations have been able to successfully leverage technology in the form of apps to enable patient engagement. For instance, The American Cancer Society has sponsored the creation of a range of apps that can spread awareness and help prevent cancer. Some of the apps are the Exercise Counts Calculator, Target Heart Rate Calculator, Cigarette Calculator, Smoking Cost Calculator, the Mammogram Reminder, among others.[4]

Ochsner, an innovative Louisiana-based healthcare organization, is promoting the use of mobile and wearable connected health tools among patients for self-management and care collaboration.[5]

Driving Stronger Engagement Initiatives

For any health engagement strategy to be successful, patients need to be treated as an integral part of the care ecosystem. Improved and constant communication between and among healthcare teams and patients can help enhance care delivery and improve patient adherence. To this effect, health devices that seamlessly connect patients, clinicians, and data for holistic proactive care are the way of the future.

Conclusion

While various stakeholders have taken steps towards promoting patient engagement, much more needs to be done before the term transforms from a buzzword to a stable concept that will result in improved adherence and care outcomes.

Summary

A holistic approach to patient engagement that leverages a combination of factors—technology advancements, multi-channel strategies, rewards, and gamification, and much more—will help continually motivate patients to better manage their health.

References

[1] The New England Journal of Medicine, Winning their Trust by Anand K. Parekh (16 June 2011), Accessed on 22 April 2016,
http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp1105645#t=article

[2] http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/851226

[3] The cHealth Blog, Will 2015 be mHealth's Coming Out Party? (8 September 2014), Accessed on 22 April 2016,
https://chealthblog.connectedhealth.org/2014/09/08/will-2015-be-mhealths-coming-out-party/

[4] The Nation's Health, Public Health-related Apps Growing in Number, Popularity: Smartphones, Tablets Used for Health by Charlotte Tucker, Accessed on 22 April 2016,
http://thenationshealth.aphapublications.org/content/41/8/1.3.full

[5] HIMSS, Ochsner Leverages Retail, Connected Health Tools & Apple Watch to Engage Consumers by Sherri Dorfman (26 June 2015), Accessed on 22 April 2016,
http://www.himss.org/ResourceLibrary/GenResourceDetail.aspx?ItemNumber=42912

About The Author

Constance Phillips-Jones
RN, MSN, CCM, CPHQ Director
Clinical Program, Healthcare

Constance is the Director of Clinical Programs and has over 25 years of clinical consulting and industry experience as a nurse. She brings with her a very high level of functional expertise in healthcare operations, population management and analytics. Most recently, Constance has been engaged in ACA implementations and helping organization through the transformation process. Her background and understanding of the end-to-end business processes has also helped in developing industry products which assist in the implementation of complex programs.

About TCS' Healthcare Business Unit

TCS partners with leading health payers, providers and PBMs globally to enable business model transformations to address healthcare reforms, improve quality of care, increase customer engagement and reduce overheads.

By streamlining and modernizing business processes and systems, TCS helps healthcare organizations realize operational efficiencies and reduce operating costs. We work closely with healthcare players to empower them to meet their consumers' demands for higher levels of service, quality of care, and new ways of interacting and engaging. Our advanced data solutions, analytics, and cutting edge digital technologies deliver a higher degree of customer centricity.

TCS' portfolio of services covers the entire payer value chain from Plan Definition, Eligibility and Enrollment, Policy Servicing, Billing, Claims Processing, Claims Adjudication, Benefit Management, Provider Management and Member Services. For providers, we deliver bespoke services for Provider Management, Claims Management, Patient Information and Financial Management, Clinical Data Management, Pharmacy Benefit Management and Revenue Cycle Management.

Contact

Visit TCS' Healthcare Business unit page for more information

Email: healthcare.solutions@tcs.com

Subscribe to TCS White Papers

TCS.com RSS: http://www.tcs.com/rss_feeds/Pages/feed.aspx?f=w
Feedburner: http://feeds2.feedburner.com/tcswhitepapers

About Tata Consultancy Services Ltd (TCS)

Tata Consultancy Services is an IT services, consulting and business solutions organization that delivers real results to global business, ensuring a level of certainty no other firm can match. TCS offers a consulting-led, integrated portfolio of IT and IT-enabled, infrastructure, engineering and assurance services. This is delivered through its unique Global Network Delivery Model™, recognized as the benchmark of excellence in software development. A part of the Tata Group, India's largest industrial conglomerate, TCS has a global footprint and is listed on the National Stock Exchange and Bombay Stock Exchange in India.

For more information, visit us at www.tcs.com

Experience certainty.   IT Services
                         Business Solutions
                         Consulting

TCS Design Services IM I 11 I 16