Five tips: Choosing a contact center for your health care organization

These are challenging times for providers. They are dealing with navigating mergers and acquisitions, staying compliant with ever-changing regulatory requirements and aligning with coordinated care networks. On top of all this, they are under increasing pressure to deliver high-quality patient services cost effectively.

To get and keep a competitive edge, hospitals and provider organizations are rethinking their business models in ways that measurably improve profit margins, achieve operating efficiencies and significantly deepen patient engagement. Patient engagement is often one of the more difficult areas for a provider to influence. Patient populations have a heightened expectation of service. They bring a consumer's sensibility to each interaction — interactions that too often feel fragmented and inconsistent in current models. Increasingly, contact centers are a valuable strategic asset to a health care organization's evolving competitive strategy.

--- KEY HEALTH CARE TRENDS ---

Consumerism

Patients expect flexibility to interact with providers anywhere, any time, including consistent experiences and access to their health records across all touch points.

Convergence

Risk-based contracts require a new level of interaction between payers and providers to co-manage patient interactions.

Compliance

Health information has to be accessible across multiple secure access points. Providers have to track and report on new quality compliance metrics that directly impact patient satisfaction.

Identifying the contact center best for you

There are many contact center models in play today. The key is to identify the approach that will best serve your business objectives and your patients' needs. These five tips can help guide your evaluation to identify the contact center model right for you.

**1**   **Tip #1: Ensure the contact center has knowledgeable agents focused on health care.**

It's not enough to keep a contact center staffed; the team of agents has to have a health care mindset. That means intentionally hiring people who can provide compassionate, personalized health care advocacy that helps patients make better informed health care decisions.

One way of achieving this level of highly knowledgeable, yet deeply compassionate employees is to actively recruit and hire people who have skills and aptitudes beyond what you would consider conventional for a contact center. For example, the contact center may look for coaches, teachers and other professionals who have the mindset for delivering one-to-one support.

It's also important that a contact center team can connect locally, which means being highly familiar with the communities and populations being served.

A best-in-class contact center should have the ability to staff people who can relate effectively to your patients at that "right next door" level that inspires confidence and trust — and leads to greater engagement.

COMUNICATING PERSONALIZED HEALTH CARE INFORMATION TO PATIENTS WHEREVER THEY ARE

CARE SOLUTIONS

BENEFIT INFORMATION

PATIENT MANAGEMENT

HEALTH & WELLNESS

TOUCH POINTS
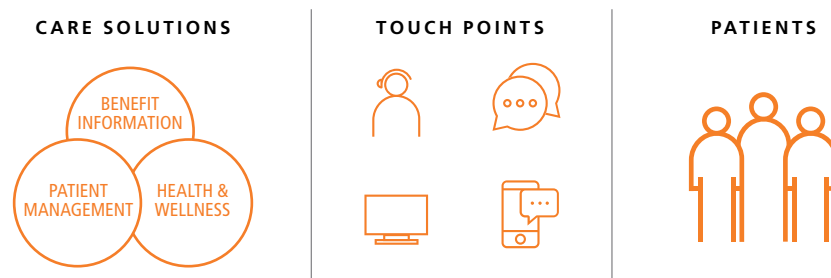
PATIENTS

2   **Tip #2: Determine whether the contact center is truly patient-centric.**

Contact centers may say they put the patient at the center, but ask for examples that show how training and tools enable each interaction to be personalized to a specific patient.

Training is essential to achieve the breadth and depth of health care knowledge to advance your objectives. Key areas to look for are training that focuses on principles of patient-centric service to make every contact personal, memorable and unique. This also ensures the contact center team can help you expand patient engagement by offering additional services and support.

Finally, research the contact center's ability to easily integrate with other enterprise systems. The contact center should also align with your electronic medical records (EMR) and customer relationship management (CRM) systems. The more flexibility to integrate touch points, processes and systems, the more valuable the contact center will be in helping you expand your patient population's reach and retention.

**3** **Tip #3: Discover how the contact center can support your offering today and in the future.**

Your contact center can and should help direct patients to in-network care — saving them money and expanding your opportunities to serve them. As you consider new offerings (wellness programs, for example), the contact center is your valuable ally in promoting these to patients at each appropriate interaction.

What are your expansion plans? Perhaps you want to offer new services or become part of a larger provider network. However you seek to expand, your contact center has to be able to expand to add services or scale to handle new volume levels. Ask about the contact center's track record in ramp-ups, including multilingual capabilities.

4 **Tip #4: Ensure the contact center's technology platform offers omni-channel support.**

From phone to online access, the contact center should be able to support voice and non-voice channels. Consider how your patients want to interact — what touch points will most engage them. How might those preferences change in the short and long term?

Ensure that the contact center can serve all of those touch points — and can quickly scale up or down to meet changing patient needs.
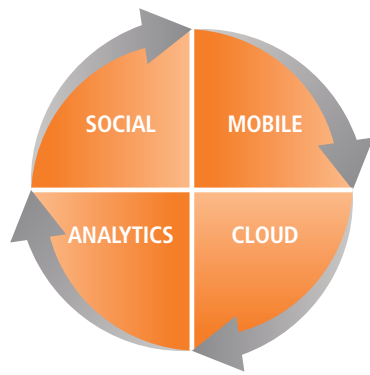
New technologies underscore the need for innovative contact centers that can provide simplified and integrated customer experience.

5 **Tip #5: Verify that the operations are consistently high-quality, highly reliable and dependably secure.**

Beyond assuring exceptional patient experiences and executional excellence, the contact center must provide secure access to health information across the shared provider network from a patient health information (PHI) perspective. That includes being able to reliably and securely manage patient interactions across the enterprise, effectively interacting with all stakeholders.

Your contact center needs to understand health care compliance regulations as well as you do and be able to track and report on the safe handling of PHI and other security considerations to ensure HIPAA compliance at all times.

To further support your compliance requirements, evaluate performance metrics the contact center provides related to HEDIS and other quality outcomes.

Just as you strive to provide exceptional service in clinic, your call center is an extension of your care and a key contributor to enhancing patient loyalty.

The value of a best-in-class contact center for health care organizations

Providers focused on gaining a competitive edge in their market can use their contact centers to deliver measurable ROI, improve patient satisfaction and optimize new revenue streams.

But not all contact centers are the same. It takes a health care-focused contact center to be able to truly address your patient needs and help achieve your objectives. Contact centers with a proven emphasis on delivering patient-centric service will enable you to deliver that one-to-one support that expands patient trust and engagement, increasing acceptance of new service offerings. And contact centers that can integrate completely with your platforms and processes will enable you to be even more effective in acquiring and retaining patients.

In selecting a contact center, think about your needs today — not only from a technology standpoint, but also from how it can support patient needs in a changing health care ecosystem. Also, consider your health care organization needs in the future so that you can choose a contact center equipped to advance your objectives over the long term.

Why Optum

Optum Consumer Sales and Service (CSS) helps providers drive high-quality care and engagement, delivering on each of the five tips identified in this white paper.

We understand the complexity of health care and are ideally positioned to deliver high-quality services to your patients to advance their satisfaction and your brand.

Talk to us today about your engagement goals.

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About Optum

Optum is a leading information and technology-enabled health services business dedicated to helping make the health system work better for everyone. With more than 100,000 people worldwide, Optum delivers intelligent, integrated solutions that help to modernize the health system and improve overall population health. Optum is part of UnitedHealth Group (NYSE:UNH).

Optum CSS contact center solution is a recipient of the 2016 Award for an Outstanding Contact Center from the International Customer Management Institute (ICMI). The Optum CSS contact center team was recognized for its best practices in building out a large-scale remote work program and a robust strategy to personalize customer interactions.

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