



MARKETING / OFFICE / STAFF

The New Age of Communication

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In the age of technology, everyone, including the patient, is seeking faster, easier ways to communicate. With a wealth of social media, blogs, websites and videos, we are constantly barraged with information – to the point of overload. To that end, patients are seeking alternative means to communicate. Enter the patient portal, which provides benefits to both doctor and patient.

Basics of the Portal

As you may or may not know, a patient portal is an internal website that enables patients to communicate with their doctor's office (and vice versa) easier than using email or multiple forms of social media. Featuring a dedicated server and third-party software, patient portals enable patients to schedule appointments online; email their doctor about health issues, herbal prescriptions, etc.; gain valuable information in the form of a newsletter; access treatment information; as well as many other options (depending on what the doctor chooses to make available). Using a secure username and password, patients can view a variety of health information.

Key Features/Benefits

Recent visits – Should patients require a log of treatments, they can create a screen capture or download the number of times they have visited you.

Diagnosis – With access to their diagnosis, the patient can better understand treatment and initiate informed conversations with you about their care plan.



Number of treatments and recommended continuance - A patient portal can give patients access to information on recommended number of treatments and continuance of care.

Secure email - Patients often have questions about their condition/care, but rather than call the front desk, they would rather send an email. This is particularly true for Millennials and Gen Zers, who generally prefer such communication. Private emails are a great way to converse with you/your office between visits.

Schedule non-urgent appointments - For solo practitioners and busy offices, this feature is terrific. Many portals enable patients to choose their appointments electronically or reschedule, eliminating human interaction. The patient receives an email confirmation that their appointment has been scheduled.

Update contact information - Some doctors do not have a central repository for frequent patient communication; a patient portal allows patients to provide updates to their home address, phone/email, and the best way to receive information/communications from your office.

Make payments - Rather than worry about collecting fees before a visit, or for those with accounts receivable, a patient portal can ensure you do not have lengthy receivables by enabling patients to pay online.

Download and complete forms - To help save time and eliminate the potential challenge of reading poorly handwritten forms, patient intake forms can be made available on a patient portal. This saves at least 15 to 20 minutes per patient in the waiting room prior to an initial visit.

View educational materials – Doctors must remain communicative with patients while continually providing value to remain top of mind.

Patient Engagement and Self-Management

There are a variety of definitions – and suffice to say that it has become a buzz phrase – but patient engagement is defined as the communication, collaboration and coordination provided by health care providers to ensure a positive patient outcome with limited obstacles. To a certain extent, one might align patient engagement with customer service. You must ensure successful engagement from the time the office phone is answered or the patient enters your practice until the time the patient concludes conversations with office staff.

The notion behind a patient portal goes far beyond simple patient engagement with your practice. Patient engagement is also aligned with providing the patient a means of self-managing care. According to research from Athena Health, "35% of U.S. adults have gone online to figure out a medical condition; of these, half followed up with a visit to a medical professional." The proliferation of the Internet has created a dearth of searches in health care, from disease and wound care to practitioner reviews. The same report from Athena Health indicates, "63% of adult cell phone owners now use their phones to go online, a figure that has doubled since 2009. In addition, 34% of these cell Internet users say that most of their online use is via cell phone. That means 21% of all adult cell phone owners – about 1 in 5 – now do the majority of their online browsing via mobile phone, not another device such as a desktop or laptop computer."

With this type of usage, more patients will review, if available, health statistics such as vitals, weight, medication, exercise or even symptoms. These searches will then lead to some form of communication with your office. This self-managed method creates more power to users because they have more information available to them than in previous years. Thus, the patient portal becomes an ideal means of engaging the patient in their own health.

Adapt and Adopt

Change in an increasingly technological world is about adaptation and adoption; it is also about leadership communication. If you throw your full support behind the concept of a patient portal, explain the benefits and uses of the technology as a means of achieving better efficiency, then your patients and staff will adopt it quickly. Why? Because a patient portal increases efficiency, improves communication, enhances workflow and increases your ability to return your patients to health.

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