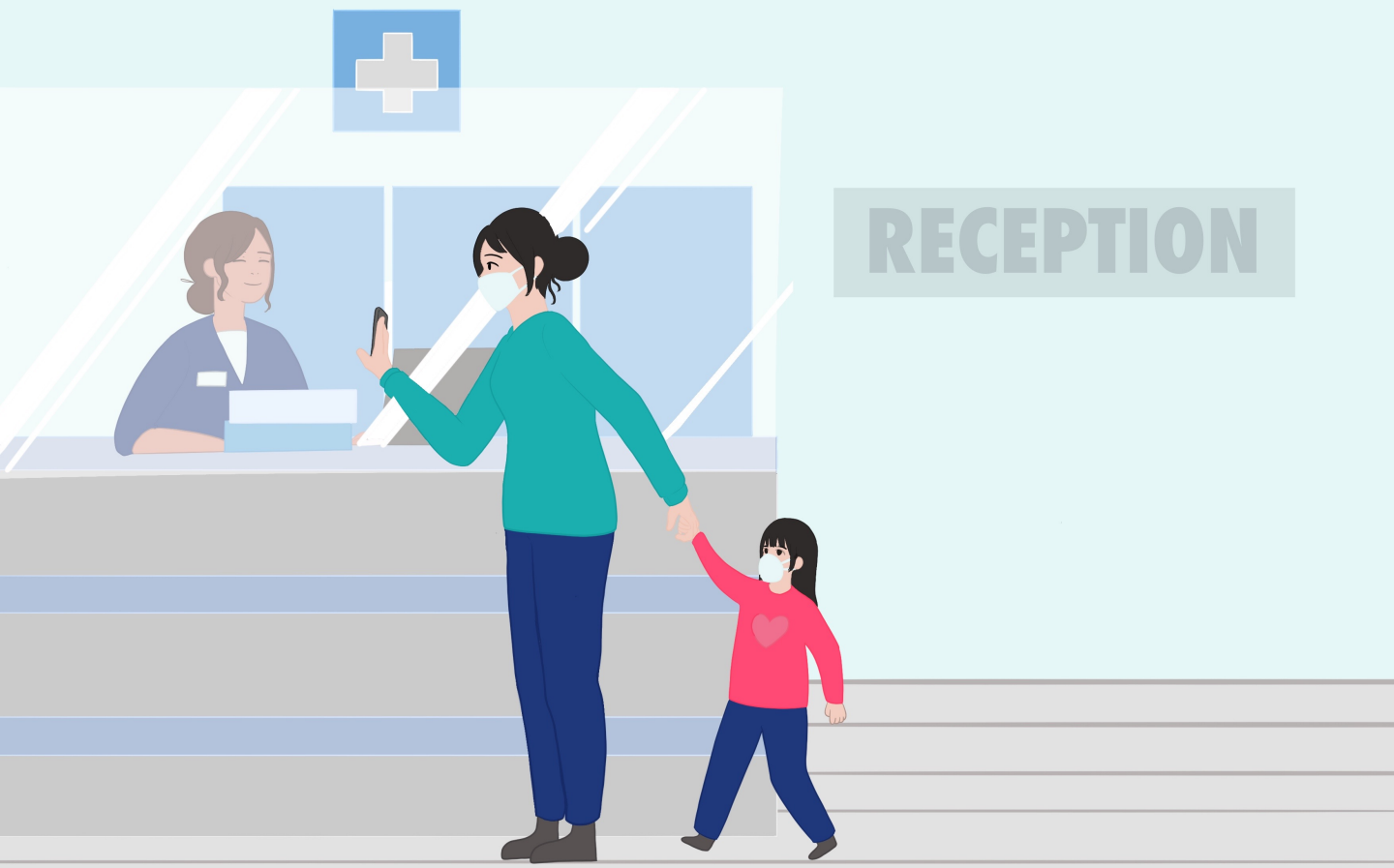
WaitWell

Improving the Patient Experience

How better PX is better for staff, patients and the bottom line



Health care operators face a multitude of priorities each day. With clinical and business responsibilities, financial burdens and limited resources, the patient experience is often forgotten. While health clinic operators may question the necessity of measuring and improving the patient experience (PX), there is increasingly strong evidence linking improved PX to better outcomes — for business, staff and patients.

For health clinic operators, improving patient experience can slash wait times, improve efficiencies, and allow doctors to retain current patients while growing their practices.

Patient experience. What is it?

The Beryl Institute defines the patient experience as "the sum of all interactions, shaped by an organization's culture, that influence patient perceptions across the continuum of care."

However, patient experience is more than a level of satisfaction measured by surveys or metrics.[1] The patient experience should:

- focus on individualized care and tailoring of services
- engage patients as partners in their care
- meet patients' expectations positively and beyond clinical outcomes
- be tied to the principles and practice of patients and family-centered care

The patient experience incorporates the full range of interactions a patient can have within every touchpoint of the health care system, including quality, safety and service moments while being impacted by cost, accessibility and affordability.

PX isn't limited to clinical and health outcomes. Administrative and customer service greatly influence a patient's satisfaction as a "customer" within the healthcare industry. Studies show that customers value non-medical interactions highly when seeking and receiving care.[2]

Why does PX matter?

According to Deloitte's 2020 Consumer Health Trends Report, consumers are taking charge of their health more than ever before by "learning about their health risks, communicating with their doctors in new and different ways."[3]

This behavior change significantly influences how consumers feel and interact with the health system. As patients become more engaged with their health, there is a **greater need for health clinic operators to treat patients like consumers or risk losing patients.**

For example, one study showed patients reporting the poorest-quality relationships with their physicians were three times more likely to voluntarily leave the physician's practice than patients with the highest-quality relationships.[4]

Overall, focusing on patient experience goes further than just retaining happy customers. It also leads to the achievement of four important pillars many clinical operators seek: higher clinical outcomes, higher financial outcomes, increased consumer loyalty, and increased community reputation.[5]

1. higher clinical outcomes
2. higher financial outcomes
3. increased customer loyalty
4. increased community reputation[5]

PX and the importance of the customer experience

The pandemic has caused great uncertainty for health care consumers around the world. However, clinics operating under a universal healthcare system are not immune from losing customers due to poor patient experience.

In Canada, while patients are less likely to consider themselves customers, there is a lot that healthcare can learn from retail service theory. Customer experience is changing rapidly, as businesses are being encouraged to push beyond traditional sales and marketing touchpoints along the customer journey and reimagine their entire business through the lens of the customer.[6]

All clinic operators should recommit themselves to understanding consumers and creating a multifaceted strategy that speaks to where consumers are right now.

The clinical case for improving patient experience

There is increasing evidence linking good PX to better clinical outcomes. According to the Agency for Healthcare Research Quality, patient experience is linked to processes of care, adherence to medical advice and better patient outcomes:[2]

- In one study, diabetic patients who reported positive interactions with their providers were found to have better self-management skills and quality of life.[2]
- Good communication with healthcare providers positively correlated with the patient's adherence to their medical or treatment plan. This trend was stronger amongst patients with chronic conditions, where patients who expressed a commitment to work with their providers achieved positive results.[2]
- Patients that experienced better PX often had better health outcomes. “Studies of patients hospitalized for heart attack showed that patients with more positive reports about their experiences with care had better health outcomes a year after discharge.”[2]

The growing argument linking PX with clinical outcomes shows that health clinic operators need to put PX at the forefront of their operating model rather than dismissing patient experience as too subjective or divorced from the clinical work of measuring safety and effectiveness.[10]

The business case for improving patient experience

Improved PX means seeing your patients as individuals who need individualized care and attention throughout their medical journey. This increased care has been shown to increase the likelihood that patients and their families become more engaged in their health outcomes, resulting in fewer medical errors.

As trust between patients and providers increases, patients are more likely to ask questions, engage with and ultimately comply with the treatment plans when they have confidence in those providing them with care.

Health providers can grow their bottom line by increasingly paying attention to what their patients want. In any business, it can cost five times as much to attract a new customer as it takes to retain one.[16] When patients have a poor experience and share that experience with others, health clinics are impacted financially.

21.7%

A 2009 study found that for each drop in patient-reported scores along a five-step scale of "very good" to "very poor," the likelihood of a provider being named in a malpractice suit increased by 21.7%.

62%

Georgia Health Sciences Medical Center saw medication errors decrease by 62%, falls decrease by 40%, and length of stay decreased by 50% after focusing on improved PX and customer engagement.[2]

75%

According to one survey of 1000 patients in the United States, 75% of patients had used online reviews to find a new doctor.[12]

$650,000 USD

CLV (customer lifetime value) of a patient in the US is $650,000 USD [19]

So, what is it that patients want?

Patients are looking for exceptional engagement and experiences to tie in with strong clinical outcomes. Customers are experiencing this from once-traditional services like banking, so it's no surprise that patients expect high levels of innovation, engagement and service from all areas of their life.

Increasingly, patients are valuing experiences such as getting timely appointments, easy access to information, and good communication with health care providers when they seek and receive care.[17]

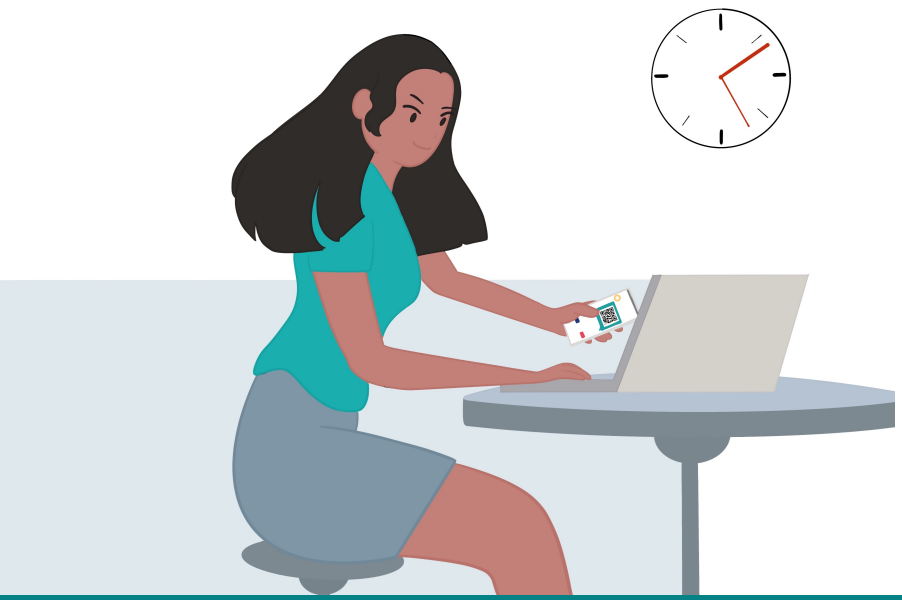
Service (or patient satisfaction and experience), care quality, and cost continue to be important factors. When asked to rank 'value statements' in order of importance, one study found the top three elements of value to patients were out of pocket costs (45%), **the ability to make timely appointments, (39%) and confidence in the provider's expertise (38%).**[18]

However, doctors and patients don't seem to be on the same page about what makes good PX:

- 30% of patients have walked out of an appointment because of an excessively long wait.[7]
- 20% of patients have changed doctors because of long wait times.[7]

Yet:

- 8 in 10 senior-level healthcare professionals believe appointments start on time while 48% of patients said they had to wait.[8]
- In 2017 only half (49%) of healthcare organizations surveyed had adopted a formal definition of patient experience for their teams.[1]



How can clinic operators improve PX?

Improving PX starts with understanding the touchpoints of the patient experience.
Patient experience doesn't start and end with medical treatment. It can start before they ever step into a health providers clinic. Health care touchpoints include:

Before the appointment:
- social media,
- reading online reviews,
- seeing advertisements or PR for a clinic,
- hearing word of mouth testimonials,
- attending community events and getting referrals from trusted sources.

Engaging with the clinic:
- the clinic's website,
- eCommerce platform,
- promotions or phone system.

How patients are treated by administrative and medical staff during booking, the day of their appointment and the wait times they experience. Interactions with the point of sales system.

Post-appointment:
- Billing, payments and post-interaction support.
- Transactional emails, marketing emails, newsletters, or any follow-up contact a patient may experience.

Health care providers should collect feedback from all touchpoints of the patient experience. While most patients rate the experience with their doctor highly, the clinical experience is only one small part of what makes up PX.

One study found that 63% of patients surveyed rated their doctor as "five stars". However, the most common complaints about health care clinics were not about the examination, the diagnosis or the prescribed treatment. Instead, 96% of complaints were related to communication, wait times and office organization with:

- 53% of negative patient feedback about communication
- 35% of complaints are related to long wait times

Why patient feedback is important to PX

Feedback is different from dealing with customer complaints. Waiting for customers to deliver feedback means losing out on the opportunity to learn from the experiences of customers' positive, negative and neutral experiences.

Feedback also helps health clinic operators understand what customers value about the service provided. Feedback should be collected in a variety of ways, as patients may have a preferred method of communication:

- Verbally, face-to-face
- Anonymous online survey
- Paper forms post-appointment
- Social media
- Google My Business
- Multi-lingual

How using a QMS can boost patient experience

It can take 24 days to get a first-time appointment with a physician, and over 8 minutes to schedule an appointment on the phone while 63% of calls are transferred to another line.[13] It's, therefore, no surprise that three out of four patients view self-scheduling as a necessity when choosing a health clinic.

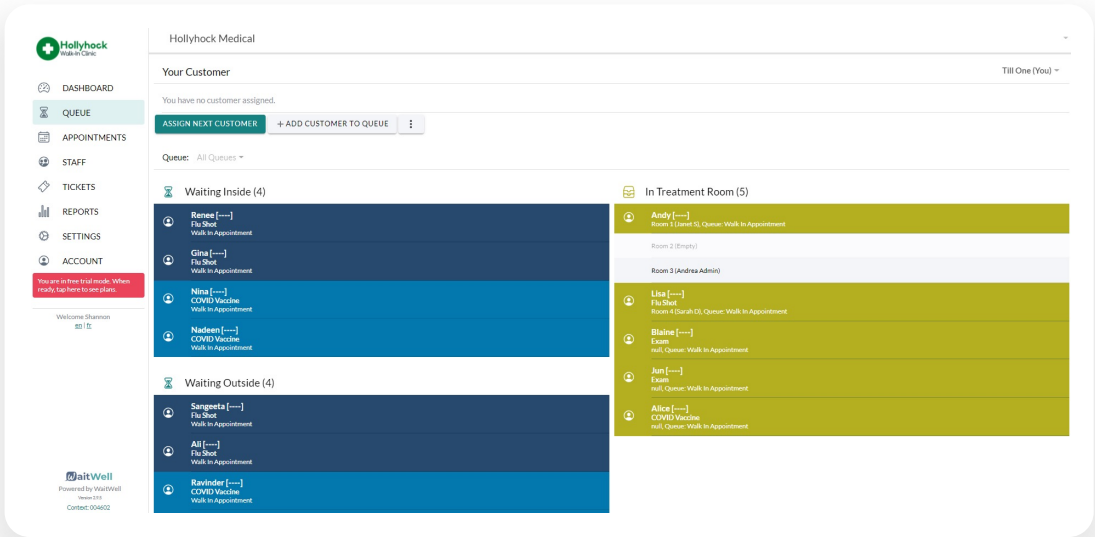
Self-scheduling isn't only easier for patients. It reduces no-shows and cancellations and allows administrative staff to focus on high-value customer-centric tasks.

Mayo clinic research studied 1,099 patients who self-scheduled appointments over one year. Self-scheduled appointments had fewer no-shows, cancellations, and reschedulings, with 29.5% of appointments made after hours.[14]

Self-scheduling gives the patient the agency they have been looking for in the booking process. A queue management system (QMS) helps health clinic operators coordinate and direct their online booking process, meet customer and regulatory requirements and improve its effectiveness and efficiency continuously.

A QMS puts the patient at the center of the booking experience. Benefits include:

- meeting the customer's expectations, which helps to instill confidence and boost reputation
- meeting the organization's requirements by ensuring compliance with regulations
- creating an efficient, streamlined process that frees staff up to focus on patient-centric tasks
- the prevention of mistakes leading to higher levels of satisfaction
- reduction of no-shows, missed appointments and long wait times for phone calls
- less crowding in waiting rooms as patients are alerted to longer wait times
- better management of walk-in appointments



How WaitWell transforms the patient experience

With WaitWell, clinics see more patients and waiting rooms are less crowded because in-office waiting time is reduced.

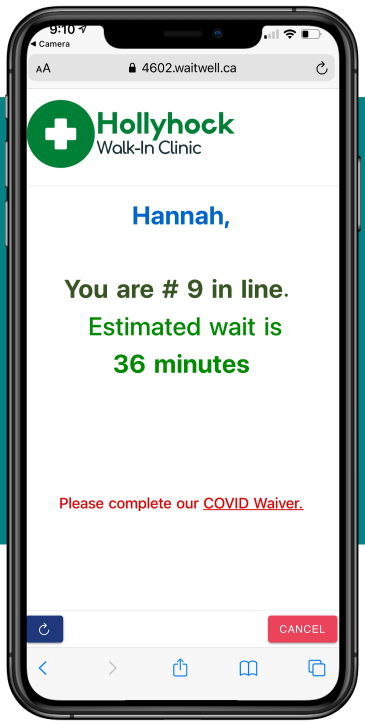
Patients wait to be seen for an appointment or walk-in visit without physically waiting in the doctor's office.

- lower in-office wait times
- less crowded waiting rooms
- fuller schedule
- digital submission or waivers and intake forms
- two-way communication between office & patient

1 in 4 patients believed their doctor's office handled COVID-19 poorly and would either not return to their doctor or would wait at least a year to return. [15]

Schedule a discovery call and get a free 14 day trial

Book a demo



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