HealthEngine

Improving the Patient Experience

One Connection at a Time

WHITEPAPER

Introduction

Australians are leveraging digital healthcare platforms to find GPs, search for information and book consultations—altering the meaning of 'patient experience' greatly. Almost 80% of surveyed smartphone owners used their device to find local health services in the past 6 months (HealthEngine's Patient Behaviour Report 2018). And researchers at NSW George Institute for Global Health went further than highlighting the general benefits of digital healthcare. They describe online platforms as offering a 'tangible opportunity to improve... the medical experience'.

However, not enough practices are keeping pace with the demand for digital by using online medical platforms to connect with patients and improve their overall experience.

Here's our guide on how to improve the patient experience.

Technology has put people in control of their treatment—and doctors need to respond by improving the patient experience.

Australians' technology usage and digital trust

There is no doubt that the Australian population are now more digitally active than ever. Marketing agency We Are Social shows there are nearly 22 million internet users nationwide. That's a staggering 87% penetration rate—and this extends to every facet of society, from social media to shopping to searching for insurance. This dependence on technology includes healthcare. Whether researching causes for symptoms of illness, trying to find a local GP or booking a consultation, Australians see the internet as a now-indispensable resource in their daily lives.

What this high level of technology usage has led to, however, is a fundamental shift in the way that people interact with healthcare practices. The online world has given people the ability to:

✚ Find practitioners in their local area, or any desired location. This offers a scope of choice beyond what they already know.

✚ Assess the reputation of a given clinic based on patients' real experiences.

✚ More easily make and manage appointments without having to set foot in a doctor's office.

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The value of improving patients' healthcare experience

Enhancing patients' experience of digital healthcare goes beyond just fast and effective treatment - customers form a (normally lasting) opinion of businesses before they even set foot on-site. Making your practice convenient, approachable and sensitive to the needs of individual patients can lead to a significant improvement in retention. This will also likely contribute to word-of-mouth referrals and positive customer reviews online, taking your clinic to new patients.

There are three main benefits of improving patients' healthcare experience:

Loyalty

An encouraging sign for Australian practices is that, despite the fact that patients can connect with more healthcare options online than ever, loyalty to a regular practitioner still exists. However, this fidelity only lasts as long as practitioners offer patients the chance to make and manage healthcare appointments online.

HealthEngine's Patient360, for example, is a comprehensive engagement solution incorporating an online booking system, automated reminders and online script requests. The platform also allows patients to access waiting time information and give feedback on their consultation. The Patient Behaviour Report claims that 90% of HealthEngine users return to the same GP for another appointment. Loyalty is not only possible, but likely, with the right digital healthcare infrastructure.

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Communication and Trust

Communication can be the difference between satisfied and dissatisfied patients. People want to be kept in the loop about their wait time for an appointment or course of treatment. They also want to be able to offer feedback on their experience. This point is made clear in Accenture's 2017 'Building Digital Trust' report. Nearly 41% of those surveyed had little to no trust in GPs' administration staff, and would have preferred to talk to their doctor directly.

Sophisticated and patient-led digital healthcare platforms increase the number of effective practitioner-patient interactions. By building trust in the security and simple administration of accessing medical information online, healthcare providers can create more time-effective processes.

Flexibility

Online access means more flexibility—we can order food, shop or book a holiday, any time, anywhere, so why not make booking a medical appointment easy too? Roughly two-thirds of online bookings are made after hours, according to HealthEngine's 'Happy Patients, Happy Practice' research. Patients want their medical experience to be on their terms.

By giving patients the power to make appointments or order repeat scripts online, healthcare practices can showcase a flexibility lacking elsewhere in the sector. This sought-after ease of use will drive a richer patient experience and encourage them to come back time and time again.

How to drive meaningful patient-practice connections

The Happy Patients report shows almost one-in-five of those surveyed said they switched clinics because their regular practice had no online booking availability. Connecting to your patients online through a digital healthcare platform isn't a nice-to-have—it's essential to retain business. Driving more meaningful patient-practice connections to build loyalty, strengthen communication and improve administrative flexibility with your existing customer base will also inevitably bring your practice to new patients.

We mentioned Patient360 before—it's the ideal solution to improving your existing connections, one patient at a time. Patient Connect, meanwhile, brings your practice to more than 3.5 million **patients** looking for **their** healthcare providers. Build your profile, generate more bookings and make it easier for patients to connect with **their** doctor and experience a higher quality of service.
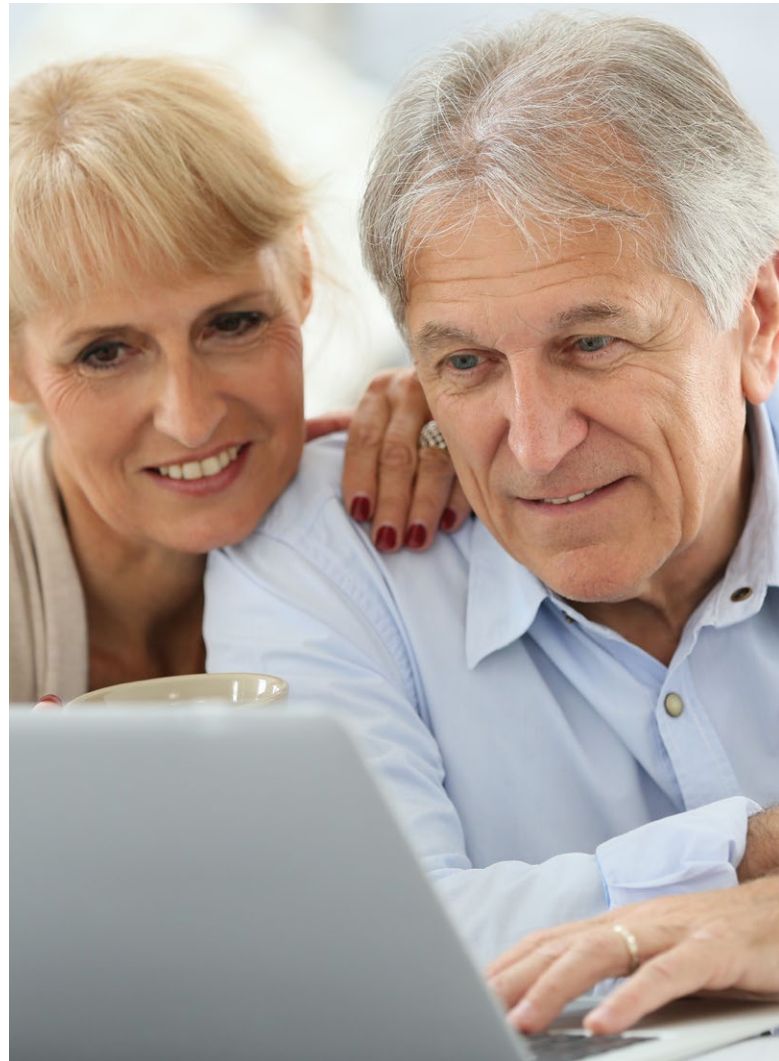
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Australia's largest network of patients

Improving the patient's healthcare experience and building long-lasting patient-practitioner relationships relies on providers leveraging digital technology to put the consumer first.
That could be through:

- ✔ Making appointment-booking more convenient;

- ✔ Allowing patients to offer feedback on their experience; or

- ✔ Simply letting patients know how long their wait time is.

Growth in your medical practice can take many forms. Whichever way you judge success, make sure you meet the unique needs of every existing patient—and new ones will inevitably follow.

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