PUTTING THE PATIENT FIRST

The value of your patient portal.

Patient centered care is at the heart of every hospital, clinic, and healthcare organization. The patient experience is critical to both maintain and expand your patient base as well as keep patients fully engaged in their care. In our modern world, people are increasingly tech-savvy and operate their lives through the internet and their smart phones. Nearly every EHR (Electronic Health Record) System has taken full advantage of this to help their healthcare partners achieve their patient experience goals by establishing patient portals. These patient portals allow patients to do nearly anything they would normally do in person or over the phone. Below, I outline four significant benefits that your organization can reap using your patient portal, and some key items you can focus on to help you reach your organizational goals.

1. **Increased Patient Engagement** - The more patients feel like they have easy access to their health information and their provider, the more likely they will be to continue coming to you for their care. Making the patient experience smooth, convenient, and accessible is key to maintaining and expanding your patient base. Patients also tend to have better health outcomes if they are engaged with their patient portal. They are more likely to show for appointments, more likely to adhere to their medications, and can even identify and correct errors on their record.

2. **Automation of Routine Tasks** - Patient portals have the capacity for patients to schedule their own appointments, send messages to their care team, and request medication renewals. These features provide tremendous benefits to both patients and your staff. Patients can avoid being put on hold and can avoid the phone altogether if they so choose. On the flip side, your staff will spend far less time fielding calls from patients to schedule appointments, directing questions to providers and fulfilling medication renewals.

3. **Payment Collection** - Healthcare organizations experience increased cash flow when they allow patients to pay online through their patient portal. Many organizations allow patients to set up payment plans online and link to helpful educational resources for patients to better understand their bills. In combination with the ability to message their billing office through the portal, the portal is a very effective tool for patients to easily pay their bills. Many EHRs have the capacity to let patients pay online even if they don't have an account!

4. **Compliance With Government Mandates** - If you're reading this, you're likely aware of the recent regulations legislated in the 21st Century Cures Act and others related to Price Transparency. Government compliance is necessary to stay operating as a business, and the patient portal can help you stay compliant. One example of this is related to releasing test results to patients. There are specific requirements in these regulations that medical information be released to patients as soon as possible (with some exceptions). The patient portal can help you automatically set up the appropriate results to be immediately released to patients, and block those that should not be.

So, what can you do to create a valuable patient experience?

1. **Activate Your Patients** - Every organization should have activation at (or near) the top of their priorities for their patient portal. Who cares if you've got cool features and a sleek design if patients aren't using your portal? Many organizations incentivize each of their departments to boost their activation numbers by offering fun incentives. Departments can improve their activation by creating a culture that encourages everyone in the

office to activate patients whenever they can. You can throw a pizza party for the department with the best activation numbers, get them some cool new office swag, or use any other incentive you can think of. Activation should be a top priority at your organization.

2. **Focus on the Patient Experience** - There's often a balance between how clinical staff and the patient prefer the portal to be used. You should focus on making the patient experience as smooth, intuitive, and painless as possible. This will keep patients coming back, paying their bills on time, and staying happy and healthy.

3. **Optimize the Functionality of Your Portal** - Utilize as much of the functionality available to you as possible. The more you allow your patient to do through the portal, the less burden there will be on your staff. Some EHRs even have programs by which you can get a discount on their platform for reaching a certain threshold of implemented features. It's a win-win!

The patient should always be your priority and following the principles I've outlined will help your organization both provide high quality care and manage operations efficiently and effectively. If you're interested in learning more or could use some help implementing and strategizing your patient portal, please reach out to Trexin.

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