

The image shows a person's hands holding a tablet. On the tablet screen, a female healthcare professional in blue scrubs is speaking and gesturing. The background of the image is a blurred clinical setting. The right side of the image has a blue gradient overlay with white text.

The connected patient

Exploring consumerization and patient accountability

Atos

From better clinical outcomes through to operational efficiencies and financial savings, digital transformation is helping to drive a radical reinvention of what modern healthcare could be. No matter how far that transformation takes us, one thing will always remain the same: care begins and ends with the patient. As technology continues to change the way that people think about their health, providers need to prepare for an era of increased patient ownership.

The past two years have placed unprecedented stress on healthcare organizations. Almost half of US adults said that they had no trust in healthcare providers to guide them through the pandemic.¹ NHS England reports that satisfaction levels are at their lowest since 2014² – with long wait times and a lack of control amongst the chief complaints.

Delays are a clear and understandable focal point for many. In one study of US-based patients, more than 50% said that they've seen some form of care appointment pushed back as a direct result of Covid.³ In the UK, a separate study reveals that almost half of GPs say patients on their list have come to harm as a result of those same delays.⁴ With those figures in mind, it's little wonder that many have begun to look for more guidance.

The consumerization of care may not be a new concept, but it is one that has now reached critical mass. The 87 million Americans who used a digital health or fitness service in 2020⁵ will have been spoiled for choice, with various app stores now housing close to half a million digital fitness services. Both Walmart and Amazon have made significant strides into the sector, providing consumers with an alternative, and more commercialized way to access everything from pharma to imaging. Even at-home test kits represent a significant shift in established care dynamics.

For healthcare organizations, this trend has the potential to create a number of new challenges.



For a start, there's the issue of integration. When a patient seeks to supplement their care with the support of a third-party, that interaction is unlikely to be recorded in their overall health profile. "Care silos" of this kind make it harder for providers to establish the best course of action, stripped as they are of a cohesive picture of their patients.

Other, potentially more serious threats exist. A patient may be recommended treatment that is unavailable through traditional means, for example. The advice they receive may be contrary to that given by their normal provider. Some people may decide to refuse care from those providers altogether. All of this assumes that the organization with which they're engaging is a legitimate, regulated entity, rather than a front for something more nefarious.

This is a very bleak view of the situation. The consumerization of care also presents numerous opportunities, not least because it has the potential to fundamentally redefine the issue of responsibility.

Whatever advances the future holds, healthcare will always be linked to personal decisions to at least some extent. Many of the new services and technologies have the potential to derail existing provider relationships with patients, they can also provide a greater sense of ownership too.

There is abundant opportunity here, particularly in the area of prevention. Stopping smoking, eating better, exercising more; these are all activities that can be promoted and monitored through digital services and tools, particularly when additional incentives are overlaid. With numerous studies showing

a clear link between higher patient engagement and better clinical outcomes⁶, nurturing that kind of preventative activity could offer significant advantages, particularly as healthcare organizations continue on the road to post-pandemic recovery.

This could also create an entirely new challenge for providers: ensuring that they remain part of the dialogue this will rely on their ability to think differently about how care is delivered. New partnerships and collaborations may be needed, particularly as healthcare continues to recover. The sanctity of patient data will become more important! As a result, providers will need to demonstrate that they, and their partners, can be trusted..

Data protection and patient engagement must become key areas of focus. Even in countries with universal healthcare, providers will need to work harder to deliver an offering that is more closely aligned to those convenient, digitized experiences that consumers can receive elsewhere.

Ultimately, where patients go, providers will need to follow. Whether it's telehealth or text messaging, online scheduling or all-encompassing apps, expectations are growing about what a great care service can be. Meeting and surpassing those expectations means building a secure, frictionless, and engaging experience across every patient touchpoint.

¹ 81% of Consumers are Unsatisfied with their Healthcare Experience. According to a New Study by Prophet and GE Healthcare Camden Group – Business Wire, March 8 2016

² Statistical bulletin: Overall Patient Experience Scores 2018 Adult Inpatient Survey Update – NHS England, June 20 2019

³ Patient Access Preferences Report: The Pandemic's Lasting Impact – Kyruus

⁴ Half of GPs say patients harmed by delays to care during COVID-19 pandemic – GP Online, October 29 2020

⁵ Number of health and fitness app users in the United States from 2018 to 2022 – Statista

⁶ Patient Engagement in 2019: Can it Impact Patient Outcomes? – Spok, July 11 2019