

## Tech meets Touch – How to transform patient experience through the revenue cycle

The patient experience is not limited to clinical care – it encompasses the full spectrum of a patient's interaction with a hospital or health system that often begins before the patient steps foot in a care facility and extends beyond discharge. While delivering safe and effective care has always been a top priority for providers, many healthcare organizations have often overlooked other elements of care that create the patient experience.

One aspect of the patient experience hospitals can no longer afford to overlook is the shift to consumerism. Patients now directly pay for a larger share of their healthcare services than they have in the past, and while consumer interactions in nearly every other industry have rapidly become more convenient thanks to digital technology, progress toward a more transparent, streamlined consumer experience in healthcare has lagged. Hospital and health system leaders looking to meet patients' consumer expectations must rethink their organization's approach to the front-end of the revenue cycle. According to Scott Rowe, vice president and Chief Information Officer with Conifer Health Solutions, delivering a frictionless experience should be a top priority in the revenue cycle.

"Patient expectations are rising and understanding the cost of care is no longer a conversation that can be left unaddressed. We are prepared to have educated and respectful conversations with patients about their share of the cost and provide flexible payment options," Mr. Rowe told *Becker's*. "We have to make sure patients understand what they might owe as this is part of what impacts overall patient satisfaction."

New technologies can help streamline a patient's financial experience, making the process more transparent for patients and more efficient for hospital and finance teams. Integrating these solutions into the revenue cycle can help generate cleaner claims, while

simultaneously meeting emerging patient expectations regarding convenience and price transparency.

### Creating a unified, patient-centric experience: 4 technology solutions to know

In this new consumer-centric environment, finance teams should approach patient interactions with a mindset of service and support.

"The first step really is having a retail-like service mentality and a total commitment to quality," said Deepali Narula, Conifer's vice president of performance improvement, in a recent interview with *Becker's*. "We have to make sure we change the paradigm to say, 'We're here to serve the patient and we will deliver a high quality work effort.'"

Emerging technology solutions can help support a more consumer-oriented approach to revenue cycle management that prioritizes more human-centric tasks, such as interacting directly with patients.

Here are four types of investments that will help front-end revenue cycle staff deliver a better experience to patients.

**1. Digital service integration.** Automating certain front-end revenue cycle tasks isn't enough to ensure a positive patient experience. When patients arrive at the point of care, this is the moment to create a great first impression. Lack of investment in front-end systems leaves many representatives juggling multiple tools to complete the registration process. This can result in representatives seeming distracted at a crucial moment when patients need an engaged and supportive team member, which negatively affects the patient experience. Digital service integration brings all disparate automated tasks together, compiling patient information into one easy to access platform.

"We want to deliver a retail-like experience for patients and that includes making their first interaction positive as this affects their perception of the entire enterprise," Ms. Narula said. "We've invested in optimizing workflows so reps don't have their faces buried in a screen figuring out what to do next. They can focus on welcoming the patient with empathy and a smile. The result becomes focused conversations that are truly patient-centric and a unified experience as patients engage with their care teams."

**2. Process automation.** Automating a number of commonplace tasks, such as eligibility and authorization checks, can allow staff to deliver patients the information they need in real-time. "Thanks to our automation investments, we can generate an individualized quote for patients when they schedule or pre-register for an appointment," Ms. Narula said. "We have invested years in advancing this technology and now automate more than 100 million tasks annually, including eligibility, authorization checks and real time individualized quote creation."

**3. Data models and advanced data science.** In today's healthcare environment, retail-like payment options are essential. Leading revenue cycle management companies have been collecting data for years and have invested in advanced technologies like artificial intelligence and predictive analytics to create data models that can determine whether patients will be able to pay upfront or if they would benefit from a payment plan. With the industry becoming more consumer-centric, patients want custom, flexible payment plans to cover their portion of the cost of care.

**4. Demand-based team schedules.** Success at the front-end of the revenue cycle also depends on having appropriate levels of staff available to greet patients when they arrive. Tools to optimize team member schedules based on patient arrival patterns can help ensure staffing models are suited to meet demand. "We've invested in automation that optimizes the schedule to make sure we're staffing dynamically using our data intelligence versus a static scheduling approach." Ms. Narula said. "We call it demand-based scheduling."

## A culture of service backed by technology

Some healthcare systems may already have AI-powered solutions to automate certain front-end revenue cycle processes, but these disparate tools usually aren't optimized in a way that supports a better patient experience. When these solutions lack a single point of integration, hospitals and health systems are less likely to maximize the potential of these investments. Integrated automation solutions can generate cleaner claims, improve the patient experience and elevate the overall value and skills of patient access team members.

"When hospitals focus on the front-end of the revenue cycle, they find that tools may address one problem, but they don't offer a holistic solution," Mr. Rowe said. "With Conifer, you integrate once, and we create an ecosystem of tools that are integrated with each other to solve a multitude of problems. This integration drives a lower cost to operate the revenue cycle."

While tool integration can make a big difference in the representative's workflow, there is still a human element technology cannot replace. To address this, Conifer created a "Serve for Better" training program that recognizes the impact of teams on the overall patient experience. The program provides a roadmap of how to deliver a positive experience and connects daily tasks to the mission of bettering the patient experience. For example, the program includes patient-friendly scripting designed to promote empathy and position teams to connect with patients. The training emphasizes what it takes to deliver a retail-like experience and links quality, empathy and connection with care teams to improve patient satisfaction.

Tech-enabled tools have made managing the entire revenue cycle more strategic and transparent and AI has taken center stage to refine the work of patient access teams. These technology advances are enabling health systems to meet the shifting expectations of consumers and deliver a more unified patient-centric experience that they are looking for while also elevating the overall value and skills of patient access team members. ■