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Hospitals are fiercely battling each other while coping with tight margins. In today's economic climate, we need to seize every opportunity to maximize referral integrity and capture revenue before it walks out the door. When patients leave uninformed or unsupported, it not only impacts an organization's revenue stream and ability to drive care pathways but also the likelihood that patients will re-utilize their services.

In today's era of consumerism, patients expect the same experience when walking into an Emergency Department as they do an Apple Store. Customers are greeted by attentive and knowledgeable staff who regularly provide status updates and address questions, without the customer having to download clunky new apps or utilize unfamiliar portals. These moments drive customer engagement and loyalty, which ultimately leads to repeat business in retail and online services. Consumer loyalty, which has mostly been foreign in healthcare, will be critical as the industry becomes increasingly competitive.

Using the same concierge-like tactics at the point of care, which can be amplified by new technology, organizations can improve the patient's experience. Health systems, via their Emergency Departments, can help create such moments, which will yield improved loyalty, outcomes, and profitable growth across the care continuum.

To ensure this happens, hospitals need to consider taking several steps:

- Leverage out-of-industry technology to compliment their EHR Patient Portal Strategy and custom app development strategy. Examples include:
  - Text-based AI Chatbots, which can keep a patient updated on their status and alert them to what's coming next. Chatbots also provide the system with another sticky connection point to help drive referral management and communicate care plans between in-person encounters.
  - Referral Management and online scheduling technology – deployed at the point of care by medical scribes or non-clinical navigators – can seamlessly direct referrals to high quality, low cost, and in-network providers.
- Integrate low-cost labor to drive a top of license strategy across their care team. Examples include:
  - Non-clinical Navigators can expand the reach of the Nurse and Case Management team. By partnering care teams with navigators, or specialized assistants, organizations can amplify the outreach to their patient population. This allows systems to economically scale their care navigation programs while improving the patient experience.
  - Medical Scribes free providers to optimize workflows and work top-of license. The term scribe, almost a misnomer by definition and utilization, can also improve efficiency and help departments right-size provider staffing ratios to drive more profitable programs amidst volume fluctuation.

By Intentionally and strategically integrating these solutions into the workflow, health systems can drive efficiency and effectiveness while improving the patient experience.

## Today's ED Environment: Noisy, Chaotic and Confusing

**Being in the ED** can be an anxiety-producing experience for patients especially if they're severely injured. They may be confused or unsure about the path ahead and the process is not always streamlined. Clinicians don't always have time to answer all their questions and explain next steps.

Why are doctors and nurses so busy? Often, it's because they're too tied up in tasks like typing notes and creating orders – tasks that make it difficult to work at the top of their respective clinical licenses. Even when clinicians have time to follow up, the discharge process is not always standardized, leading to missed follow-up appointments and patients who then seek care outside of the health system. All of this can lead to lost revenue and poor outcomes for all parties.

The good news is that streamlining emergency department processes and supporting physicians with leading-edge technology and the right labor resources can have a significant positive effect on the patient experience, boosting the likelihood patients will follow up with doctor's appointments and potentially build brand loyalty. A patient who is satisfied with their ED experience is more likely to schedule necessary follow-up visits, stay within the health system for primary care and specialist needs, and recommend a provider to their friends and family members.

In many healthcare institutions, the hiccups begin with the triaging process, said Dr. Michael Murphy, CEO of HealthChannels, which supports health systems with medical scribing, care management and technology solutions that improve productivity and patient experience. "It matters how people come into the ED, are triaged and get registered," Murphy said. "The first impression says a lot."

A lack of communication as the process moves forward can make for an even more significant problem, Murphy said. As patients are triaged, bedded, examined and eventually leave the ED, they're often uninformed about progress or prognosis as clinicians attend to other patients. And when the patient is finally ready to leave, the discharge papers are often too lengthy, non specific and follow up is typically not clear or easy to accomplish.

Through investments in technology and dedicated personnel, forward-thinking health systems are improving patient care, bolstering patient satisfaction and driving downstream revenue for follow-up visits.

### Hospital Case Studies – Learning from Your Peers

**At Florida Hospital**, a health system with facilities in Orlando, Tampa and Daytona Beach, leaders have Modern Healthcare Executive Brief



been working to streamline its emergency departments in recent months as part of a company-wide effort undertaken by its parent, Adventist Health System, said Sergio Abril, director of revenue cycle operational decision support.

"We understand that healthcare is lagging in technology and customer experience, in feasibility and ease of use," Abril said. "How do we make that experience of going to the hospital a little bit easier?"

Another organization, New York-based Mount Sinai West hospital, has been working to streamline its intake of cardiology patients, who were often admitted to the hospital overnight from the ED, especially on weekends, because disposition plans for them were too inefficient, said Jeffrey Bander, director of operations, cardiology.

"We had a lot of patients sitting on the floor overnight, taking up space, all waiting for Monday morning so they could get appointments for stress tests or cardiologists," Bander said. "We needed to get technology for next-day or same-day appointments for stress-testing, so they wouldn't need to stay in the emergency room any longer."

In this white paper, we'll explore how Florida Hospital, Mount Sinai West and other providers are revolutionizing the ED experience for patients and ultimately helping their hospitals progress toward the Quadruple Aim: improved quality, reduced costs, and positive patient and staff satisfaction. Plus, let's not forget, drive profitable growth in a tightening competitive landscape.

**"A positive patient experience in emergency department requires thoughtful communication that will lead to well-aligned expectations and a positive outlook of the health system and its clinicians."**

## Keeping Patients Engaged and Aware

**For many providers,** technology can play a key role in streamlining the ED and turning the patient experience from frustrating and unexplained waits toward a more relaxed, concierge-like experience.

**Tactic 1: Text-Enabled AI Chatbots** Progressive health systems are now utilizing text-enabled AI chatbots to help guide patients through their treatment journeys. Once they've registered in the ED, the chatbot engages them immediately and provides instant, regular communication on their status and any questions they might have. The bot is able to communicate when test results are ready, when a bed will be available, and if a practitioner is on the way.

"With chatbots, the patient can better understand their status," Murphy said. "Updates are continuously being pushed to their phone. And they don't have to download an app, which eliminates a barrier to entry."

That ease of use is key when introducing a new technology to patients. Adoption rates for new app downloads or portal engagement can often be low. But most consumers, regardless of age, are familiar with text-messaging and are very likely to engage with an AI messaging platform. Many out-of-industry companies are already utilizing chatbots with high success.

The ED is an unpredictable place, and sometimes things don't go as planned. Sometimes physicians get busy, or labs and imaging get backed up. That's where a chatbot can be particularly helpful in keeping patients informed and managing their expectations. Emergency care isn't always perfect, but transparency can go a long way in keeping patients satisfied.

Greg Johnsen, CEO of LifeLink, a medical chatbot technology company, believes the text-enabled technology could be a game-changer by not only keeping the patient engaged and better informed during the process, but also ensuring discharge instructions are digestible and easy to understand.

"Chatbots have tremendous potential for the ED because of their ability to provide information and answer questions in a personalized, conversational format," Johnsen said. "Keeping patients informed through mobile phone chat is powerful, especially in an emergency situation, where people are generally unhappy, confused and disinterested in reading gigantic information packs."

During the discharge process, chatbots can provide a streamlined point of communication for their instructions and follow-up procedures. If a patient needs to wait 24 or 72 hours for a culture, or a confirmatory read on an X-ray from the night before, the results can be pushed to them immediately via

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text message, rather than requiring a staff member to follow up.

The same goes for making follow-up appointments: a chatbot quickly prompts the patient to schedule a follow-up visit online, rather than relying on the patient to remember, or wait for a staff member to call. This automation can lead to improvement in outcomes, making it more likely that a follow-up visit will occur. This can be useful for patients who are young and less likely to adhere to follow-up, as well as older patients who need assistance in keeping track of an abundance of health conditions.

**Tactic 2: Point-of-Service Referral Management** Improved scheduling technology, such as LiveReferral by QueueLogix – a HealthChannels company – is also playing a role in improving the ED experience. To resolve its cardiology patient backup, Mount Sinai West worked to unify its inpatient and outpatient scheduling platforms, so that ED schedules are integrated with those of the clinics and departments at the point of care. That way, ED staff can quickly see what cardiologists have availability and whether they accept a patient's insurance, Bander said. Technology like LiveReferral also enables the health system to easily identify in-network specialists to maintain referral integrity—and keep dollars from flowing out the door.

"Delays are gone. You're now able to find a cardiologist at 2 o'clock the next afternoon that takes the patient's insurance," Bander said. "You can immediately send the patient's information and the reason for the visit to the doctor." And this technology provides an easy point-of-service tool that can be used—ideally by navigators or scribes—to reduce what can be a 10-minute referral process to as little as two minutes.

Mount Sinai patients can then be discharged from the ED with a text message showing where and when they needed to report for their appointment, which has significantly boosted compliance rates out of the ED, he said.

## Freeing Up Clinical Staff

**Technology like chatbots** and point-of-care referral management can greatly improve the ED experience, but they're most effective when placed in the hands of the right staff members. So, providers should also consider investing in staff dedicated to supporting medical specialists and facilitating the patient experience. Clerical staff like scribes and non-clinician navigators, specially trained to manage these platforms and engage appropriately with patients, have the potential to free up doctors and nurses from non-clinical tasks, allowing them to practice at the top of their license and ultimately provide better service to patients.

**Tactic 3: Medical Scribes & Navigators** Scribes interpret and listen to the patient-provider encounter, documenting the illness and treatment plan with guidance from the provider. This frees up the provider to intently listen and engage his or her patient.

“When they leave that patient encounter, the physician isn’t worried about the note—they’re worried about what’s happening next,” Murphy said. “They can work from the top of their license, see more patients and spend more time with patients.”

While scribes handle providers’ notes, patient navigators can guide patients through their ED journey and beyond, ensuring they understand discharge instructions and schedule follow-up appointments. These staff members don’t just free up doctors and nurses – they can also allow hospitals to optimize the use of their case management and social worker team. While ED navigators tend to patients that are low- to medium-risk of being readmitted, clinical social workers can focus their efforts on those with significantly higher risk, like those with chronic diseases or difficulty accessing care.

Florida Hospital has used navigators to ensure patients have a follow-up appointment scheduled before they walk out of the ED. Rather than burden clinicians or the patient with this process, embedded navigators talk to patients, identify their needs and follow up by getting them scheduled for that next appointment.

“These navigators are being very intentional around what we call ‘motivational interviewing,’” Abril said. “Whereas before, the doctors and the nurses were kind of trying to help the patient understand the importance of following up, the navigator is focused solely on that process, and has the time to motivate patients to follow through.”

Navigators are key to ensuring the ED embodies Florida Hospital’s established standards for customer service: “love me,” “keep me safe,” “make it easy,” and “own it.”

“The navigators are central to making sure those service standards are lived every day,” Abril said. “The patient knows, ‘I have someone responsible for making sure I have that next step of care.’”

Scribes and Navigators play an important role in improving physician satisfaction, a goal that’s of ever-increasing importance to hospitals as they shoot for the quadruple aim. “Everything works downstream,” Murphy said. “If you have happy clinicians, you’ll have happy patients.”

### The Importance of Integration – Perspective from Three Executives

Systems that integrate both sophisticated technology and in-person scribes at Mount Sinai have relieved cardiology staff who spent significant time coordinating follow-up visits with patients who presented in the ED, Bander said. That process now takes place much more quickly and efficiently.

Technology and management solutions need to be integrated to get the same power and effect, Murphy said. “If everything is one big system, they can communicate with each other,” he said. “You get the greatest synergies and greatest return on investment when it’s completely streamlined. You’ve got to have that interoperability.”

Integration of technology and staff is the key to Florida Hospital’s long-term plans for improving patient experience, Abril said. The health system is working toward a single point-of-contact for patients after they’re discharged – a team of staff members who will contact patients to see how they’re doing and answer any questions, supplemented by easy-to-use technology.

“Consumers can buy a car or sign up for a mortgage in just minutes on their phone, but something as simple as scheduling a follow-up appointment or simply seeing your labs, that process is so convoluted,” Abril said. “We want something centralized and easy for the patient.”

### Bottom Line Impacts – Loyalty Drives Profitability At Florida Hospital,

referral volumes have risen to about 50 new patients entering the network each day, Abril said. The health system eventually expects the navigator program to pay for itself.

Changes at Mount Sinai West have definitely increased patient satisfaction now that they no longer have to wait in the ED for sometimes two or three days, said Bander. Mount Sinai has increased patient volume in the outpatient clinic by about 15%, with improved referrals playing a key role.

Compliance rates with follow-up cardiac visits at Mount Sinai have risen to around 80% to 90% for patients with appointments within 24 hours, and 70% for follow-up appointments scheduled within 72 hours. That’s been shown to reduce readmissions to the hospital, which can be costly and negatively impact outcomes.

“It’s definitely increased the capture of our cardiac patients, who had been traditionally leaking,” Bander said. “They were following up with cardiologists elsewhere—now they’re following up with Mount Sinai.”

### Looking Towards Tomorrow’s ED

**Healthcare organizations** looking to bolster volume and improve their ED experience must consider how both technology and dedicated support staff can play a role in keeping patients satisfied and allowing providers to remain focused on clinical duties. When providers aren’t distracted by non-clinical tasks, they have more time to focus on delivering high-quality care, and when patients feel cared for and are informed about their emergency treatment, they’re more likely to be satisfied and engaged in their health outcomes. Ultimately, this can help steer patients toward a consistent relationship with their health system, rather than a one-time encounter in the ED.

Florida Hospital, Mount Sinai West and other systems have experienced proven results through the introduction of new out-of-industry technology and workforce optimization strategies. HealthChannels offers a complimentary assessment to identify strategies to help improve ED efficiency. Learn more at [healthchannels.com](http://healthchannels.com).