Over a decade ago, not many hospitals would have considered hiring an executive from a major hotel chain to oversee “guest relations” and few, if any, had a “chief patient experience” officer in their executive ranks. Today, however, the transformation has taken hold and is reshaping the patient care experience.

Purpose
The primary purpose of this white paper is to explore the industry dynamics driving the intensified focus on improving patient experience and how health care leaders are using interactive patient technologies to help increase patient satisfaction and engagement.

Industry dynamics
With the shift in health care payment models from volume to value, accelerated with the enactment of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), the patient experience has garnered greater attention as an indicator of provider performance and an important dimension of value-based care.

The ACA has helped forge the link between reimbursement and patient-experience metrics while the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid’s (CMS) Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) has taken price and quality transparency to a new level. Whether or not the value-related financial penalties or bonuses stemming from the ACA are enough to drive change, the movement toward “patient consumerism” and the need to be more patient-centric is rapidly becoming a top priority in health care.

Over the past two years, the number of organizations employing a patient experience staff of 3 or more jumped from 35 percent to over 50 percent.

Satisfaction is one component of the patient experience

Patient satisfaction, largely measured in the past retrospectively and focused on inpatient encounters, is no longer the only indicator in the complete patient experience, given the increase in high deductible health plans, narrow networks and value-based purchasing. In fact, the American College of Healthcare Executives’ survey released in 2016 shows patient satisfaction is among the top five concerns cited by hospital chief executive officers as top issues confronting hospitals in 2015.

According to the Beryl Institute, satisfaction alone is not enough to define the total patient experience. Patient satisfaction is embedded within the total experience, combined with a focus on individualized care and a tailoring of services to engage patients in their own care. With a growing focus on the patient experience, progressive hospital leaders are recognizing the need to explore new ways to facilitate communication, respond directly to patient concerns and questions when raised, and be proactive with innovations in health care technology.

The emergence of interactive patient technologies

Tailored to meet the emergence of a patient-centric care model, Interactive Patient Technologies (IPT) have increasingly become an integral part of the information technology (IT) landscape for hospitals and health systems. Where once, electronic medical records and other technologies took the highest priorities, IPT is finding its place among the rooms, lobbies and corridors within some of the most respected health care institutions in the nation.

An example of one hospital’s commitment to the patient experience

Parkland Health & Hospital System began their journey over a decade ago when the Dallas County Commissioners called for a bond election to replace the aging facility. Eighty-two percent of Dallas County voters approved the bond to build the new Parkland campus. Implementing an interactive platform became a cornerstone of the hospital’s strategy to help improve patient education and engagement and, ultimately, patient satisfaction.

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**Parkland Health & Hospital System — Dallas, Texas**

- **2.1 million** square foot facility opened in August 2015
- **862** inpatient beds
- **Over 65,000** discharges in 2015

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*Image: A woman holding a child, pointing at a screen.*
As part of the development process, hospital staff listened to the voices of key stakeholders. Specifically, clinical staff wanted to create an environment where patients felt more connected — less isolated from the care team, family and friends. They wanted a unified communications system that would help build patient engagement, which includes electronic access to the care team — a system that would help patients become more educated about their diagnosis and engaged in their treatment plan.

For the information technology team, the architecture had to be scalable, easy to use and integrated with peripheral systems so information could quickly flow back and forth. The technology team wanted a solution that would integrate with multiple technologies without putting added strain on resources. As such, the system needed to be managed by a small group and require little maintenance and support.

“As it turns out, even the least tech-savvy patients are using it and with very positive feedback. The primary goal is for patients to be engaged in their own care.”

— Joseph Longo, VP of IT Enterprise Technologies
Parkland Health & Hospital System

The Interactive Patient Technology that Parkland implemented is a platform designed to more actively engage and inform patients about their care. Leadership did not ask staff to add steps to workflow; the information already existed and the system’s user-friendly design simplified and automated the delivery of content and tools to patients, clinicians and administrators when and where they need it.

Parkland can use the technology in multiple ways, allowing patients to proceed at their own pace. Patients can access patient education about their diagnosis directly through their in-room television instead of waiting to ask questions in person. Patients can view dietary menus, access environmental control and learn about their daily activities — and patients can find out who will be taking care of them. “Using existing IT resources to maintain and manage the system, we wanted to strike a balance between ease of use and functionality. Just because something is technically feasible doesn’t mean you should use it … unless it enhances the patient experience,” according to Longo.

As a result of the hospital’s commitment to leverage the latest technology and tools for the patients they serve, Parkland has been named three times in a row as one of the nation’s Most Wired™ Hospitals for technology excellence. According to results of the 18th Annual Health Care’s Most Wired® survey, released in 2016 by the American Hospital Association’s (AHA) Health Forum, technology is improving the efficiency of care delivery and creating a new dynamic in patient interactions.
How interactive patient technologies are transforming the care experience

Even with the new interactive patient platform in place, IT staff members continue to engage end users, patients, nursing staff and focus groups, gathering feedback so that the system keeps improving and growing with the facility. “The leadership at Parkland wanted a road map to be able to efficiently meet changing needs over time. We were taking a quantum leap in technology for our future, yet one of the biggest challenges was not to overwhelm staff, which translated into building a solid technology platform that would support future applications later — on demand,” said Longo.

Benefits

Hospitals are increasingly recognizing the intrinsic benefits, both financial and clinical, associated with improved patient experience. From a profitability lens, recent Accenture research suggests United States hospitals that delivered “superior” customer experience achieve net margins 50 percent higher on average than those of hospitals providing “average” customer experience. While cutting back on staff has long been one strategy for hospital systems, the same analysis found that a hospital system with $2 billion in revenue would have to cut 460 jobs (based on an average loaded salary of $100,000) to achieve the same 2.3 percent margin benefit that improving the customer experience might bring through revenue growth.²

From a clinical perspective, patient satisfaction has a strong correlation to patient engagement and compliance. Satisfied patients are more likely to adhere to prescribed treatment plans, maintain an ongoing relationship with a health care provider and realize subsequent benefits related to health outcomes. All of these factors influence an organization’s HCAHPS scores.³ Hospitals with low HCAHPS scores are more likely to have lower value-based purchasing scores related to clinical measures that influence reimbursement and associated quality metrics.

Emerging from the movement to patient consumerism, patient satisfaction has also grown in its ability to influence purchasing decisions. In fact, more than 80 percent of health care consumers say reputation for skill and quality of care is the most important criterion they use in selecting a hospital. Seventy-seven percent of patients definitely will or probably will use hospital patient satisfaction ratings from a third party to aid them in future hospital selection decisions and 60 percent indicate that high levels of patient satisfaction would be one of the top three issues influencing their hospital selection according to a J.D. Power and Associates Study.⁴

87 percent of CIOs identified improving patient satisfaction would be a top priority for their organization in the next 12 months.

Health Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS), 2016.
Interactive patient technologies

With a renewed focus on the benefits drawn from patient satisfaction, IPT is revolutionizing the bedside experience by transforming the patient room television as well as patients’ mobile devices into an interactive education, engagement and entertainment platform. Some health care delivery organizations are positioning IPT solutions as a critical component of their “hospital of the future” or “interactive patient room” strategies.

Using IPT solutions, patients and their families can stay in touch in a variety of ways — via telephone, email, instant messaging or social media. Patients can communicate with their care givers and learn about their specific conditions. IPT entertainment options make the hospital stay less stressful for patients, families and visitors. IPT educational options contribute to a more informed patient, during and after their stay.

An expansive IPT solution is capable of delivering services and high definition (HD)-video telephony through televisions, kiosks, digital signage, mobile devices and more. Multiple devices or touch points are used to engage the patient in order to help smooth the experience at a facility, from check-in to diagnosis, from treatment to discharge.

From the patient perspective

Once established in their rooms, patients can use the platform to access a variety of information. Utilizing an HD monitor in their room, the patient can speak with a nurse, view menus/dietary restrictions and order food, take surveys, make phone and video calls, access schedules, change room temperature, learn about their condition and medications, and view a checklist before discharge. The patient can also access videos and educational material based on their diagnoses.

One nurse relayed a story about how a woman who was about to give birth used the technology so that the father who was overseas could share in the birth of their baby through video telephony.

The solution helps reduce anxiety by focusing on patient support and allowing patients to recapture a bit of control they may feel is lost in a hospital setting.

The platform:

• Empowers patients with a sense of control during a stressful or vulnerable situation
• Helps streamline processes to free up time for clinicians to spend with patients
• Improves communication between care team members, patients and physicians through video telephony
• Minimizes the demand on technology resources to maintain and support
How interactive patient technologies are transforming the care experience

**From the care team perspective**

On the clinical side, IPT helps focus care through patient interaction connecting with the care team at the right place and time to enjoy greater meaningful interaction with patients. Nurses can monitor pain levels and make sure patients know what procedures they are scheduled for as well as provide educational materials at the point of care.

Communication happens between two endpoints — the patient in the room and the physician can be anywhere for a non-diagnostic consult. For example, through video telephony, an off-site physician can check in remotely with a patient shortly after admission or prior to discharge and a patient in bed can talk with a pharmacist about their prescriptions before leaving the hospital.

In addition, hospitals can engage content providers for meditation and relaxation offering calming scenes in HD to visually enhance the viewing environment and help alleviate stress.

**Conclusion: The future design of the patient experience**

Historically, health care has been more task-oriented and focused on the delivery of prescriptive health. As hospitals move toward a patient-centric model, health care leaders should continue to determine where Interactive Patient Technology fits and how it can help the satisfaction of their patients. Health care leaders who continue to explore various strategies in the clinical setting to improve patient satisfaction and engagement will be in a much stronger competitive position to thrive in a new age of value-based care and patient consumerism.

**Sources**

4. J.D. Power and Associates National Hospital Service Performance Study, 2005
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Authors

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Marina McDonough has over 23 years of health care experience helping hospital organizations improve financial and operational performance. In her current role, Ms. McDonough fosters collaboration with strategic partners and across multiple business disciplines to bring new solutions to market. Ms. McDonough has been a frequent industry speaker on a variety of hospital revenue cycle topics, is a Fellow of the Healthcare Financial Management Association and member of the American College of Healthcare Executives, and has a master of healthcare administration from the University of Minnesota.

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Natalie Miller has extensive health care experience in both technology-related and clinical roles. She has over five years of experience as an emergency room nurse and has applied her experience and background in health care technology where she has held leadership positions in clinical informatics and product management for over 10 years. She has a demonstrated record of success in delivery of quality health care solutions for both small and large, multi-site health care systems, resulting in their ability to provide efficient and effective patient care. Miller is an active board member of the Beryl Institute and sits on the Patient Advisory Council. She is also an active member of “Women in Technology Organization” and mentors students interested in STEM (science technology, engineering and math) career paths.

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