

# COVID-19's Impact on Patient Engagement Expectations

Survey Insights Reveal Patients' Post-COVID Preferences  
Identify Opportunities for Health Systems to Meet Shifting Expectations





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Although some healthcare organizations excelled at communicating with patients during the COVID-19 outbreak, many doctors and health systems in the U.S. struggled to meet patients' communication expectations. As a result of their experiences, patients are prioritizing communication and re-examining relationships with their doctors.

Before the pandemic, patients hoped their doctors would provide actionable information tailored to their needs. Now, patients expect this level of highly personalized communication. As this report shows, COVID-19 fast-tracked patients' communication and engagement expectations.

## Key Findings



### Rising Expectations

**50%** of survey respondents have higher expectations for their doctors since COVID-19.



### Lacking Communication

The top reason patients lost confidence in their doctor during the pandemic was **infrequent communication** about COVID-19.



### Shifting Attitudes

**23%** of patients say their opinion of their doctor has changed since COVID-19.



### Churning Patients

Nearly one in five patients (**17%**) are considering changing their doctor based on how they handled COVID-19.





# 49%

## Patients' Unmet Need for Accurate and Trustworthy Information

Less than half of patients received general information about COVID-19 from their doctor during the pandemic.

# Insufficient Communication from Trusted Healthcare Partners

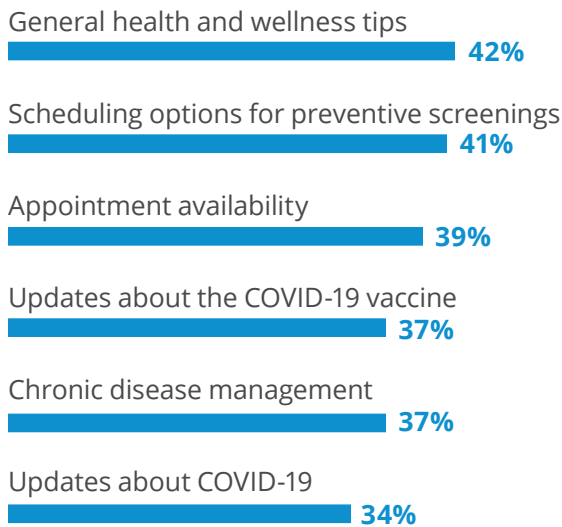
*Too few patients received critical information about COVID-19.*

Misinformation about COVID-19 spread nearly as rapidly as the coronavirus itself during the pandemic. Unfortunately, the lack of reliable and trustworthy information severely impacted patients across the U.S.

Healthcare organizations struggled to communicate and connect with patients to provide reliable information when the need was significant, and the lack of action was detrimental. Fewer than half of Americans (49%) received general information about COVID-19 from their doctor. Just over one-third (35%) received communication about the COVID-19 vaccine.

Patients want to rely on their healthcare team for valuable health-related information outside of office visits. Survey findings reveal Americans would like their doctors to communicate regularly about a variety of topics and provide information ranging from general health and wellness tips to updates about COVID-19.

## Preferred Types of Information



To meet these expectations, doctors and healthcare organizations need a patient engagement strategy that delivers proactive and hyper-personalized patient outreach.





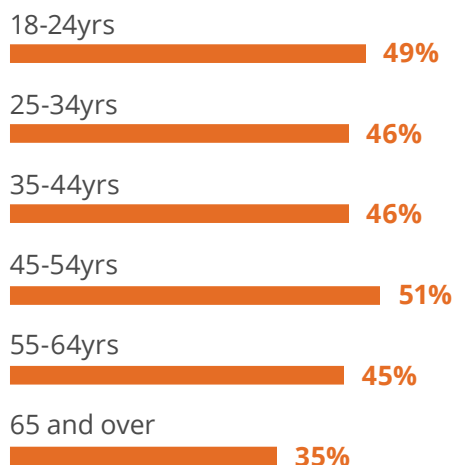
# Healthcare's Missed Opportunities

*Despite patients' desire for communication, outreach remains limited and healthcare organizations continue to miss critical opportunities to engage patients, improve health and drive revenue.*

Survey findings reveal patients across demographics are interested in receiving regular communication from their healthcare team. Nearly half of patients (48%) would like their doctor to communicate with them more proactively. Currently, health systems' patient engagement efforts are falling short. Only 55% of patients who were contacted by their doctor about COVID-19 received updates with information about COVID-19 or the vaccine. Just 45% currently receive general health information, 29% get information about scheduling preventive screenings and 21% receive information related to their chronic conditions.

## Patients of All Ages Desire Proactive Communication

Patients who would like their doctor's office to communicate more proactively.





Patients report that retail brands reach out more frequently than healthcare does with consumer engagement messages. According to survey findings, 18% of adults received 10 or more unsolicited communications from their favorite retail brand during the past six months; only 3% received 10 or more engagement messages from their doctor.

## Missed Opportunities to Engage Patients

Retailers not only reach out to consumers frequently, they nurture relationships and drive loyalty with communications that are highly relevant to their customers. Leveraging consumer purchase and behavior data, retailers precisely tailor outreach to engage and influence customers. Healthcare needs to use data in a similar way.

Patients want and expect more relevant engagement communications from their doctors. With rich and expansive information to share, and an audience that prefers to receive relevant communications from doctors (66%) vs. retail brands (34%) healthcare could be engaging consumers more successfully than other industries. However, it misses opportunities by not using data effectively to create meaningful communications that resonate with patients.



### Patients Prefer Healthcare vs. Retail Messages

Patients were asked “Would you rather receive proactive information from your favorite retail brand about an upcoming offer or your doctor about relevant health information?”



*Doctors and health systems can learn strategies from consumer-facing brands for engaging consumers and driving action. Those just starting out on their patient engagement journey, or even those that are further along, can look at brands like Amazon to identify tactics to which today's healthcare consumers will respond.”*

Mike Linnert, CEO at SymphonyRM



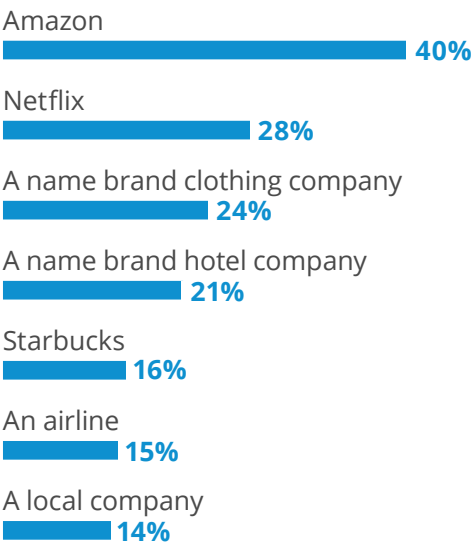
# Missed Opportunities to Impact Health and Drive Revenue

Healthcare teams typically rely on patients to initiate contact. When doctors don't proactively reach out to patients they miss countless opportunities to influence patients with targeted messages designed to minimize care gaps, boost participation in preventive care, support chronic disease management or achieve other similar objectives. According to patients, 43% missed a preventive care appointment during the past year, yet 71% said they would likely schedule a preventive care appointment if prompted by their doctor. Healthcare teams can book more appointments, catch preventable health issues earlier, achieve outcomes required to earn high quality scores and reimbursement under programs such as MACRA and MIPS, and drive additional revenue with simple data-driven outreach campaigns.

When building a patient engagement strategy, healthcare organizations may want to take notes from Amazon and Netflix. Both brands leverage customer data to learn behaviors and create hyper-personalized consumer experiences. According to survey findings, consumers rate these as their top picks for brands that meet a "gold standard" for communication.

## Amazon and Netflix Rated Highest for Engagement

Patients say these consumer brands meet their "gold standard" in terms of communication.







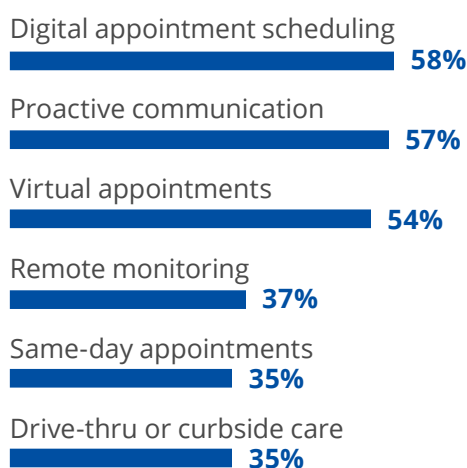
# Shifting Patient Expectations

*Relevant communication is essential to earn patients' confidence.*

The pandemic dramatically changed the healthcare industry and altered the patient experience. The shift towards telehealth and other types of remote healthcare increased patients' expectations for both frequency and relevance of provider-patient communications. Half of patients (50%) now say they have higher expectations of their healthcare providers vs. before COVID-19. When asked about their heightened expectations, patients most often cited digital appointment scheduling (58%), proactive communication (57%) and virtual appointments (54%) as important.

## Shifting Expectations Can Inform Changes to Care Delivery and Patient Engagement

COVID-19 increased patients' expectations.



Patients' feelings about their doctors have also shifted. More than one in five patients (23%) report that their opinion of their doctor changed as a result of the pandemic. Of those whose opinion of their doctor changed, 59% gained confidence in their provider. Unfortunately, 41% lost confidence.

A drop in patient confidence can significantly deteriorate patient-provider relationships and hurt patient retention. In fact, nearly one in five patients (17%) are considering switching to a new doctor based on their current provider's response to COVID-19.

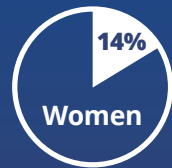
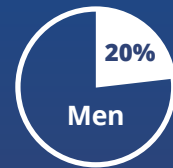
Patients point to communication as a top driver of their feelings toward their healthcare team. Healthcare organizations that communicate with patients frequently via digital channels have an advantage over those that don't. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of patients who feel more confident in their doctor following the pandemic cite frequent communication that educates them on how to prevent COVID-19 infection as a main reason for their increased confidence. Forty-seven percent (47%) suggest providers using digital tools such as text and email to communicate about appointments and check-in boosted their confidence.

The top reason patients lost confidence in their doctor was infrequent communication about COVID-19 (53%). Therefore, it isn't surprising that patients who are shopping for a new doctor are prioritizing communication. According to survey findings, 63% of patients contemplating switching doctors say they will consider whether potential providers use digital communication tools before choosing a new doctor.

## Patients Are Contemplating Changing Providers



Nearly **1 in 5 people** are **considering switching** doctors based on how their provider handled COVID-19.



## Lack of Communication Hurt Patient-Provider Relationships

# 53%

of patients who lost confidence in their doctor said it was because their provider rarely or never communicated about COVID-19.

# An Engagement Checklist for Doctors and Health Systems

Survey data clearly demonstrates that patients desire timely, relevant and personalized information from their doctors. A strategic patient engagement plan can help healthcare organizations meet — and exceed — patients' evolving expectations. This checklist is a good place to start when looking to build or expand a patient engagement strategy.

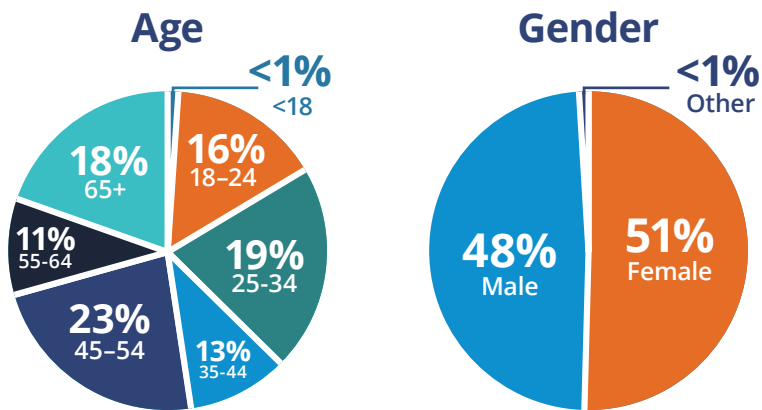
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|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Start with Data</b>                                                      | <b>Set Goals</b>                                                                                    | <b>Be Proactive</b>                                                       | <b>Communicate Clearly</b>                                                                      |
| Leverage data from multiple sources and use it to guide engagement efforts. | Use data to identify opportunities to improve health and drive revenue, then set goals accordingly. | Anticipate patients' needs and preferences, then communicate proactively. | Include clear calls to action and communicate in ways that are easy for patients to understand. |
| <b>Make it Relevant</b>                                                     | <b>Prioritize Engagement Messages</b>                                                               | <b>Target New &amp; Existing Patients</b>                                 | <b>Measure Outcomes</b>                                                                         |
| Tailor messages for each patient.                                           | Focus on the next best action for each patient to drive the greatest impact.                        | Make engagement part of patient acquisition and retention.                | Track progress using meaningful metrics and measure against goals.                              |

**Work with a patient engagement specialist to help you achieve your goals.**

**Connect Now**

# Survey Methodology

SymphonyRM conducted an online survey in May 2021 to determine how the pandemic impacted patients' engagement preferences. The survey captured responses from a broad distribution of 1,192 consumers in the U.S.







# About SymphonyRM

SymphonyRM is helping health systems transform how they acquire, engage, and retain patients by creating an engagement model rivaling the capabilities of world-class, consumer-centered organizations. By generating data-driven, prioritized next best actions for every consumer, prospect, and provider in a health system, SymphonyRM is helping organizations anticipate member needs and use proactive outreach to build deeper customer relationships and drive better outcomes while increasing revenue.



## Get Started with SymphonyRM Today

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