



The Perfect Appointment Workflow

A Path to Improved Patient Outcomes
and Increased Revenue



Though the future is beginning to look brighter on the COVID front thanks to the ongoing vaccine rollout and declining case numbers, the pandemic has taken a heavy toll on healthcare organizations. From patients deferring care, to curtailed office hours and temporary closures, to lost revenue and reimbursements, providers are reeling from the impact the virus. Now, they're trying to recover and figure out how to climb back to pre-COVID levels of operation and revenue.



A purple circular infographic showing 87% of the circle filled with a lighter purple color. The number 87% is centered in white text.

87%

of healthcare leaders said safety was patients' top reason for not scheduling

A light green circular infographic showing 30% of the circle filled with a darker green color. The number 30% is centered in white text.

30%

average revenue loss for providers

A blue circular infographic showing 50% of the circle filled with a lighter blue color. The number 50% is centered in white text.

50%

revenue loss for one in five providers

Roughly [87 percent](#) of healthcare leaders said safety was patients' top reason for not scheduling care visits during the pandemic. Along with significant drops in patient volume, a study by the American Medical Association reported that the average revenue loss for providers was more than [30 percent](#). Other research suggested that one in five healthcare organizations saw revenue plummet by [50 percent](#).

Add to that the fact that patients' communication preferences have changed during COVID while no-shows and late cancellations continue to plague providers, and it's plain to see that the current appointment workflow isn't working. In the last couple of years there's been a growing communication gap between patients and their providers:

- Patient satisfaction with healthcare communication fell [seven percent](#).
- Patients' desire for phone calls dropped 14 percent.
- [79 percent](#) of patients want to receive text messages from their provider.
- 73 percent of patients want to be able to send texts to their provider.



We live in a world where patients' expectations continue to evolve and their preferred way to interact with providers today is by texting. But that's clearly incompatible with current appointment workflows that rely heavily on time-consuming and resource-draining manual phone calls to reach patients. In the end, this shift means that providers aren't meeting patients where they are, which diminishes patients' ability to get the care

they need when they need it. *One in three* patients said they would consider switching providers because of logistical issues, including communication.

What providers lack is a text-first patient communication approach that emphasizes a fast, accessible, and results-driven system to minimize disruptions and ensure patients arrive on time and prepared for appointments.

Disruptions and a Broken Workflow

In healthcare, disruptions are an inevitable part of the multifaceted logistics of scheduling and treating patients. Whether these everyday interruptions are patient-driven, internal issues, or “acts of God”—even before COVID entered the scene—they inevitably snowball into costly setbacks for providers. Most often, they come in the form of people not showing up for their appointments, late cancellations, and patients arriving late and unprepared for their visits. It’s no secret that the average no-show rate is [10 to 30 percent](#), which translates into annual revenue losses of [\\$150,000 to \\$300,000](#) per provider.

But disruptions also come in other ways that directly impact your business. [Sixty-two percent](#) of providers agree that non-adherent patients affect quality metrics, which means providers take a hit on reimbursements. As touched on previously, lowered patient satisfaction stemming from communication incompatibilities can affect loyalty that also dips into a provider’s bottom line.

That’s why stopping the bleeding is paramount. By establishing better lines of communications with patients and achieving greater efficiencies in the appointment workflow, providers can minimize and mitigate many of these hitches to profitable enterprise.



Hold the Phone

Today's patients are busy, juggling multiple responsibilities, often working from home, and they don't have time to wait on hold or play other telephone games with providers.

A circular infographic with a purple outer ring and a white center containing the text '60%'.

60%

of patients say they won't wait on hold for more than one minute before hanging up.

A circular infographic with a green outer ring and a white center containing the text '1/3'.

1/3

of those who hang up won't call back.

A circular infographic with a blue outer ring and a white center containing the text '36%'.

36%

of patients said being placed on hold is a huge time waster.

A circular infographic with a purple outer ring and a white center containing the text '49%'.

49%

of patients get phone call reminders, but only 18 percent want them.

However, the existing appointment workflow isn't working primarily for two reasons—patient communication preferences have changed and technology has advanced. For example, consumer-friendly technologies like texting have raised the bar for people's communication expectations. People use texting for restaurant reservations, to book hotel rooms, and rent cars. Shouldn't patients also be able to use texting for something as important as their healthcare?

But in many instances, patients and providers simply aren't speaking the same language when it comes to healthcare conversations. The result is that current appointment interactions are limited, less effective, and often painful—for patients and providers.

Phones

- For patients, texting from smartphones is fast, convenient, and comfortable, yet providers are still trying to set up appointments by phone. The response rate for text messages is *209 percent* higher than it is for phone calls. The average time it takes to book an appointment by phone is *eight minutes* while it takes only *four seconds* to send a text message. When voicemail appointment reminders go unanswered or patients get put on hold, the outcome is fewer confirmations and higher no-show rates. It also leads to lowered patient satisfaction due to the hassle and frustration they experience from playing phone tag with providers. Clearly, phone calls are an ineffective way to reach patients and expend valuable staff resources that could be better used elsewhere.



EHRs and Patient Portals

- Reliance on electronic health records (EHR) and patient portals as an appointment reminder tool is also problematic and contributes to hiccups and delays in the appointment workflow. EHRs aren't designed for efficient patient communication while patient portals can be difficult to use and only [*nine percent*](#) of patients actually use portals. Just connecting with patients through these tools is challenging and sending appointment messages through them is largely futile.

Basic reminder systems

- Simple appointment reminder solutions can send a single text reminder, however they're extremely limited in their capabilities. These systems don't have the ability to send a series of reminders, typically have caps on the quantity of text messages that can be sent, and don't offer the flexibility to communicate with groups of patients for unexpected events and schedule disruptions. They're also not user-friendly for staff, making them difficult to self-service and deliver time-sensitive patient communications.

Multiple workflows

- Though the introduction of telehealth during COVID has been a boon to providers, many organizations use separate and distinct appointment workflows for in-person versus virtual care visits. This duality creates extra work for staff, is inefficient, and is confusing for patients.

Healthcare organizations need a method to communicate with patients that is quick, effective, and that meets patients' communication preferences without overly taxing staff resources. Providers want an appointment workflow that works for them rather than against them through which they can connect with patients at every point of their healthcare journey. Establishing clear, more personal communication better positions providers to ensure that schedules are filled and patients arrive on time and ready to go.

Redefining the Appointment Workflow

In order to sidestep the many pitfalls involved in modern patient communications, a more engaging appointment workflow requires a text-first approach that meets patients at each phase of the appointment journey. [Eighty-six percent](#) of providers said that text messaging improved patient experience and 81 percent said text messaging improved patient outcomes.

At every step, from scheduling and confirming the appointment to the visit itself, and to follow-up instructions and reminders, providers need to reimagine care as an ongoing progression rather than as individual events. Efficiency and success will be driven by:

- Automated communication
- Group messaging
- Two-way text messaging





Through automated text reminders and instructions, providers can connect simultaneously with multiple patients based on their individual communication preferences. Automation allows providers to reach patients by casting a wider net while reducing the amount of time staff spend making phone calls. During the pandemic, patients' desire for automated communications across the patient journey increased to [84 percent](#). Automated text messages are a speedy and effective way to communicate:

- Appointment reminders
- Pre-visit instructions
- Patient intake
- Surveys
- Recall reminders
- Portal adoption
- Education





To achieve the flexibility to reach groups of patients or all patients at once, group messaging is a vital component of a more refined appointment workflow. Whether it's a health emergency, a weather emergency, or an effort to promote preventive care like flu shots or the COVID vaccine, group messaging helps providers reach large numbers of patients at the click of a mouse. Manually attempting to reach patients by phone under such circumstances is impractical and a costly drain on staff resources.

The final piece of the puzzle in a redefined appointment workflow is providers' ability for two-way text message communication

with their patients. Again, the vast majority of patients today want the ability to text their provider directly to ask questions and quickly get answers. Real-time, two-way text messaging enables pre-screening questions, "park & text" communications, and serves as a valuable tool to remind patients to schedule follow-up care. A text-first mindset is central to a provider's appointment workflow and creating an end-to-end communication loop that engages patients throughout their journey.

The Perfect Appointment Workflow

To connect more effectively with patients throughout the appointment experience, providers need to communicate with patients during **five main stages**—**schedule, prepare, same-day, visit, and follow-up**. Each touchpoint guides and supports patients at crucial points before, during, and after the care visit.



Schedule	Prepare	Same-Day	Visit	Follow-Up
Recall	Pre-visit instructions	Check-in	Patient encounter	Post-visit care instructions
Gaps in care	Confirmation/ Cancellation/ Reschedule	"Park and text"		Patient surveys
Outreach	Appointment Reminders	Telehealth instructions		Reschedule reminders
Scheduling	Intake	Answer questions		Billing questions
	Answer questions			Answer questions



The perfect appointment workflow, maintained by an automated, text-first communication strategy, helps patients keep their appointments and to show up on time and prepared. When patients are well-informed and communication is more effortless, they'll not only get the care they need but adherence and satisfaction levels will also increase.

A streamlined appointment workflow supports both virtual and in-person appointments while clearer and more user-friendly communication allows providers to form stronger relationships with their patients. The implementation of a perfect appointment workflow can improve patient outcomes even as it reduces staff time spent on phones and increases provider revenue and reimbursements.



Solutionreach is 100 percent focused on providing the technology, and the expertise on how to effectively use it, to deliver better care and build a more profitable practice. We did it first, and after nearly 20 years, we're continuing to lead the way.

We show practices how to improve the patient experience and connect with patients in the way they want to connect. The result? More patients schedule more appointments and actually show up for them. More patients leave glowing reviews of their providers for others to see, and then they book appointments. And all patients get regular communications that keep them connected to the practice and coming back.

But we can't do it alone. Each practice we work with has to be "all-in". When practices commit to working with us, we bring all the experience we've gained working with 52,000 other practices to the entire process, whether it's that first welcome email or a practice check-in five years down the road.

If a practice is willing to roll up their sleeves and get to work on making patients happier and healthier, then we're the right partner. If a practice is ready to start growing and increasing revenue hand over fist, then we're the right partner. To learn more about whether or not we're the right partner, schedule a personalized consultation now at www.solutionreach.com.

