

Health System Leverages SR Health Text Messaging to Roll Out COVID-19 Vaccines

SUMMARY

A healthcare system in Alaska was seeking a more effective and personal way to reach their patients. Like many healthcare organizations, they needed a patient communication platform that would better enable them to connect with patients quicker and more efficiently than burdensome phone interactions, which generated low customer-satisfaction levels in their patient surveys. In turning to SR Health, they applied automated text messaging to streamline their appointment scheduling and two-way text messaging to better serve their patients.

CASE STUDY

The health system had a growing list of concerns about the patient communication system they were using—it was slow, inefficient, and worst of all, patients didn't like it. Patients would get stuck on hold for 20-minutes just trying to call in and schedule an appointment or to ask a simple question. Due to system glitches, there were also instances where the wrong communications were sent out or privacy issues created when patients' email addresses were inadvertently disclosed.

"It was clunky and oftentimes put us in embarrassing situations," said the organization's senior director of operations. "We needed a more professional system for appointment confirmations and appointment recovery so that if something was cancelled we could quickly fill it in with another appointment."

However, the main driver for adopting SR Health was that they wanted to establish a better relationship with their patients in order to take the customer experience to the next level. Since the vast majority of their patients own and use their cellphones to text message friends, family, and businesses, they knew texting would be a better way to serve their patient community. Anecdotally, if a patient could text his or her hair stylist to make an appointment without interrupting their workday, the administrator said, why couldn't they text their healthcare provider to schedule a check-up?

"One of our biggest sticking points from our patient satisfaction surveys was our phone tree, just how cumbersome it was, and how patients didn't enjoy having to work through that," he said.


Health System
NextGen

Scheduled 5,000
vaccines with one text



No-show rate
declining



Sending 20x more texts
than phone calls

“Opening us up to two-way communication via texting was going to help us meet them where they’re at.”

With the addition of two-way, text messaging, their patients are able to text questions about care instructions or other queries in a whole new way that wasn’t possible before. For example, patients at an osteopathic manipulation clinic in their health system can now text follow-up questions about their pain care management appointments and get fast responses from staff without ever having to make a phone call. As the use of text has increased, the need for phone calls has quickly declined. Over the first five months using SR Health they have sent 20 times more text messages than phone messages.

Another benefit to the health system’s switch to SR Health was a significant drop in their appointment no-show rates. Prior to this, their no-show rates averaged around 18 percent. But with the ability to text multiple appointment reminders, no-shows have dropped significantly. The resulting impact has been sizable for the organization.

“I’d used SR Health with one of my previous organizations. I had seen it be very successful in reducing no-shows and increasing confirmations,” the administrator said. “I wasn’t surprised at all when I saw the positive impact that it had on our no-show rates. There’s been a distinct improvement.”

In a wholly unanticipated outcome of moving to SR Health, the health system was able to mobilize the platform’s group messaging tool to affect an immediate and timely impact on their rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine to patients. Within a very short window, they

sent out 20,000 texts to nearly 10,000 patients with scheduling information about a pair of upcoming COVID-19 vaccination events for elderly patients. As a result, in February 2021, they scheduled about 5,000 vaccine doses. Better yet, they believe the group messaging feature led to a much-improved customer experience for patients.

“The response was phenomenal. In terms of branding with our patients, I think it engendered a lot of trust because they could hear from their provider when the vaccine was available earlier than on the news or any of these other communication tools,” the administrator said. “It was smooth and it was easy. It was seamless, and it was secure.”

During the second phase of SR Health implementation, the health system plans to use targeted group messaging to recall and preschedule specific groups of patients for critical preventative care, including OBGYN and internal medicine applications. That will considerably alleviate the burden on staff who currently perform time-consuming phone-based outreach activities for recall. Once again, the health system’s capacity to offer patient-preferred automated and two-way text messaging will continue to lead to better informed and more satisfied patients.

“And so, from an efficiency standpoint and a patient satisfaction standpoint, it will be huge,” the administrator said. “Rather than getting a voicemail left on their cellphone when they’re at work, patients could just get a text message and reply ‘yes,’ please schedule me with the front desk.”



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