

6 Steps to Improving Patient Communication

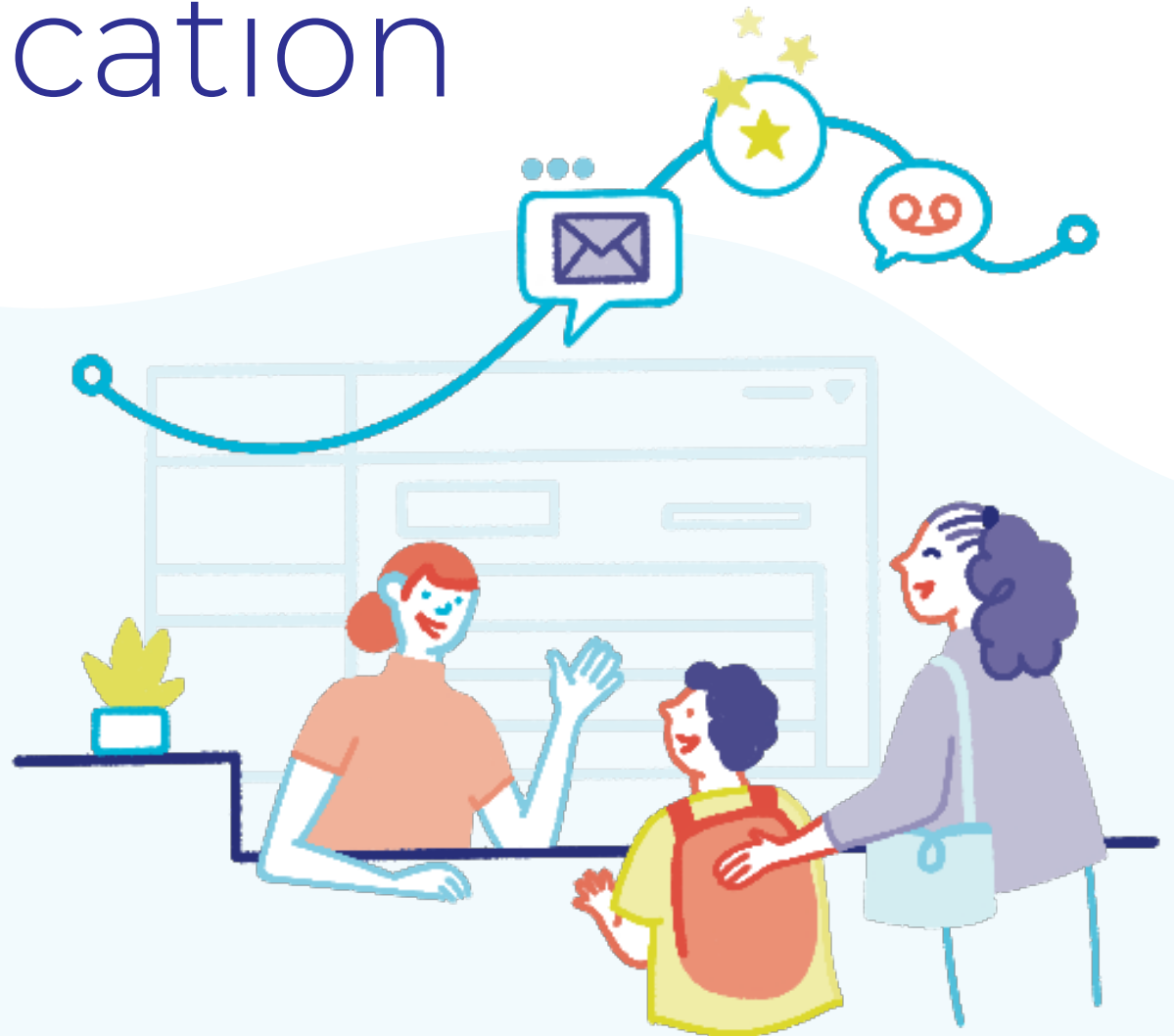


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Introduction: Patient Expectations Are Rising

Patient expectations of what a good experience is are rising. And unfortunately, unless your practice is evolving and meeting those demands, it will be impossible to engage new patients and retain existing ones.

According to Healthcare IT, [today's patient expects their healthcare experiences to rival their best consumer experience.](#)¹



¹ Healthcare IT. [2019]. How Cisco thinks about improving the patient experience. Retrieved from: <https://www.healthcareitnews.com/news/how-cisco-thinks-about-improving-patient-experience>

Introduction: Patient Expectations Are Rising

Providing a connected online experience is no longer a nice to have, but it is now expected. And because of technology, patients know which practices are providing this exceptional patient experience.

So to thrive in this fast-changing world, offices need to be able to evolve and match those of consumer experiences.

Throughout this guide, you will learn:

- ① How to meet patients high expectations
- ② The importance of patient communication
- ③ 6 steps to providing exceptional patient communication



Patient Engagement is Key

The key to meeting these expectations and retaining patients in the dental industry, is creating high levels of patient engagement.

Patient engagement is incredibly important because it's healthcare's version of a great customer service. If you engage your patients, they will:

- Keep coming back to your practice
- Share their positive experience with friends and family

But in reality, according to the NEJM Group, only 34% of patients tend to be highly engaged according to experts.²

² NEJM Catalyst. [2017]. Patient Engagement Survey: Improved Engagement Leads to Better Outcomes, but Better Tools Are Needed. Retrieved from: <https://catalyst.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/CAT.16.0842>



Patient Engagement is Key

With the industry entering post-COVID, numbers are likely much worse, with WHO recommending patients delay routine dental care during the pandemic. This is why it is so important to maintain that relationship, even if the patients aren't routinely coming in.

So how can you increase patient engagement?

Your practice needs to offer consistent, seamless and personalized communication throughout the entire patient journey.



Why Patient Communication is Important

Patient communication is one of the strongest tools there is for providing great patient care and improving satisfaction. In fact, patients are so accustomed to excellent communication in other industries, they actually now expect the same from their healthcare providers.

This isn't a detriment to your practice, but an opportunity.

With a good communication cycle in place, you're actually ensuring that you're not going to let anyone fall through the cracks. And this will ultimately help you keep your patients engaged.



Why Patient Communication is Important

In fact, 42% of patients say they would be more engaged if they were contacted between visits.³


And with the way things have changed in the dental industry, providing that excellent communication throughout the patient journey has never been more important.

For example, with the new healthcare protocols of minimizing contact with patients, innovating how you communicate is crucial for ensuring you are still meeting patients expectations and properly engaging them.



³ Health IT Outcomes. [2012]. The Shocking Truth About Patient Engagement. Retrieved from: <https://www.healthitoutcomes.com/doc/the-shocking-truth-about-patient-engagement-0001>

6 Steps to Improving Patient Communication

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- Step 1 Keep patients informed with practice updates
 - Step 2 Include critical information in your reminders
 - Step 3 Use 2-way chat to communicate with patients in real-time
 - Step 4 Continue the communication post-appointment
 - Step 5 Encourage feedback from your patients
 - Step 6 Get patients back with recalls



Step 1: Keep patients informed with practice updates

We live in a busy world, where the only way to get the message through is to communicate the way the patient wants. With this in mind, the first touchpoint in the patient journey is sending practice updates and filling appointment requests.

By sending practice notification, you keep your practice top of mind while communicating crucial information to your patients. Some tips around optimizing this step include:



Pro Tip: Encouraging patients to book needed appointments will also keep your practice top of mind while filling spots in your schedule.

Pro Tip: Segment your patients. Tailor your communication to your patient-base, send in different languages or send different notifications for new patients vs returning patients.

Pro Tip: Set up an emergency messaging plan that you can easily launch when needed.

OMS Tip: Sending new process reminders via text message is a great way to make sure that your patients are equipped with the information they need to follow your protocols.

Step 2: Include critical information in your reminders

Everyone is guilty of forgetting about an appointment. That's why this step is so important for keeping your patients engaged.

It's now an expectation among patients that you will remind them of upcoming appointments and include customized pre-appointment instructions.



Pro Tip: For procedures that require special attention and need patients to be well prepared, make sure to include key instruction in your reminders.



Pro Tip: Keep your patients and staff safe with wellness forms and symptom alerts. These kinds of precautions can help reassure your staff that every step is being taken to ensure their safety. And as an added bonus, this survey can be a way to reschedule the patients that aren't feeling well.



OMS Tip: Remind patients to follow fasting instructions with timely reminders before appointments.

Step 3: Use 2-way chat to communicate with patients in real-time

With the new health regulations in place, practices are having to figure out ways to adhere to the social distancing protocols while maintaining excellent service. One solution we're recommending is implementing a virtual waiting room.

For example, if you implement a virtual waiting room that uses two-way texting, you can require patients to text the practice when they arrive and the front desk can use the two-way text to communicate with patients in their predetermined waiting area.



Pro Tip: Ensure you have a two-way texting program available on your office computer to ensure things run smoothly and make it easy on your office staff.

Pro Tip: Set up chat templates for your staff so they are well prepared to communicate effectively with patients.

OMS Tip: Allow patients to text you with ease if they are experiencing complications or have questions after their surgery.

Step 4: Continue the communication post-appointment

A very important step for ensuring your patients are engaging in their oral health, is ensuring you send post-appointment follow up messaging.

This could include messaging post-op instructions or post-appointment surveys, to ensure optimal outcomes in your patients oral health.



Pro Tip: Personalize your follow up based on procedure type.



Pro Tip: Add important post-appointment check-ins to determine if your patients have developed symptoms afterwards.



OMS Tip: Add important, procedure specific post-appointment check-ins to determine if your patients have developed symptoms afterwards.

Step 5: Encourage feedback from your patients

Next step in the journey, is soliciting patient feedback and getting positive online reviews.

For example, now that you've created a safe and exceptional patient experience, you can send surveys to gather feedback after appointments

and encourage your happiest patients with a review reminder online.

This is a great tool for engaging new patients as online reviews are the new patient referral.



Pro Tip: Analyze your feedback surveys to find areas of improvement.



Pro Tip: Send review requests to happy patients.



Pro Tip: Embed review results on your website.



OMS Tip: Reassure new patients they are in good hands with recent and 5-star reviews on the sites that matter.

Step 6: Get patients back with recalls

For general practitioners, the final step in the journey is using recalls to get your patients back. Recalls can be considered as any recurring appointment, not just hygiene.

This is another touch point that you can easily automate, to ensure you are doing everything you can to keep engagement levels high, and improve patient retention.



Pro Tip: Reach out to patients who may have missed their appointments due to COVID-19.



Pro Tip: Customize by recall type, Ortho, teeth whitening, even botox; any appointment that requires a followup visit.



OMS Tip: Message patients that have dropped off after their consultation to encourage them to book the next stage of their surgery.

Patient Communication That's Personal

By offering consistent and personalized communication, you will ensure that no patient falls through the cracks, and this will result in better patient engagement.

For example, patients who receive specific communication for their procedures:

- ① Will show up prepared
- ② Have better outcomes
- ③ Reduce your cost of care



Intiveo: Patient Communication Software That's Personal

Intiveo is a cloud-based patient communication software that provides automated and customizable patient communication that fits your practice. We help 14,000 providers deliver 50 million messages to improve the outcomes of 18 million patients.

Our features that help your practice:

- Customizable, procedure-based messaging
- Attach key documents and forms
- Easy-to-update reminders
- Automated recall messaging
- 2-way chat
- Post-appointment surveys and reviews requests
- Multi-language
- Cloud-based software

Self-Assessment: Are Your Patients Engaged?

Now that we've taken you through ways to improve patient engagement, it's time to start implementing these tips in your own practice.