

CASE STUDY

Real-time feedback and transparency transform urgent care centers

OUR WORK WITH

Sentara Medical Group

Sentara Medical Group discovered faster listening means faster improvement.

Sentara Medical Group (SMG), a division of Sentara Healthcare, includes 181 sites, 2,700 employees, and 840+ providers in Virginia and North Carolina. SMG has more than 1 million patient visits each year and a projected annual growth of 15 to 20 percent over the next three years.

The challenges

In early 2015, SMG's urgent care was losing money. To find the root cause of the poor financial performance, SMG looked to its customers—the patients—with the help of NRC Health. While SMG had collected patient experience surveys in the past, the amount of feedback was underwhelming: 400 responses per year, and only 25 percent of those responses contained patient comments. This sample size was too small to be credible in the eyes of SMG physicians.

Additionally, the outreach methodology presented challenges. Experience surveys were sent via mail and often took up to six weeks to yield returns. SMG physicians weren't confident that the data captured reflected the true patient experience due to the length of time between the care experience and the patient's opportunity to respond. This lag time also made any form of service recovery impossible.

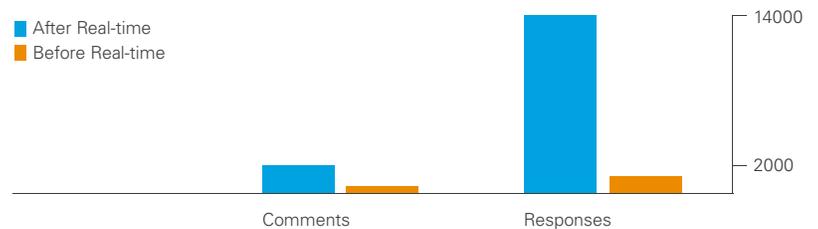
Further issues were identified that impacted SMG financially. Patient volume is key to profitability in urgent care—SMG needed to grow its volume to turn things around. Since urgent care is a very competitive segment of medicine, an improved online presence was needed in order to reach the 77 percent of consumers who go online to find a provider.¹ SMG determined the Internet would be a key contributor to driving volume and sought to improve search engine performance.

The solutions

Listening quickly

Using real-time feedback from NRC Health, SMG patients were contacted and asked to fill out an experience survey within hours of their urgent care visit—when their experience was still top-of-mind. Reaching out via email or phone dramatically improved response rates. SMG quickly gathered more than 14,000 surveys on urgent care visits, approximately 35 times the number of responses previously received. Better still, this information was available to urgent care staff in real-time, allowing them to immediately identify issues and make necessary adjustments.

Patient feedback helped SMG uncover a misaligned focus in the culture of the urgent care department. Rather than being centered on the patient experience, the culture focused on the provider. Discovering this perspective was a critical component to SMG's turnaround efforts.



Being seen

With NRC Health star ratings, SMG was able to convert patient feedback into star ratings and reviews and post this data online—where patients were already searching for urgent care options. This helped SMG move to the top of search engine results when patients searched for urgent care. Owning the top spot in search, in tandem with high volumes of positive patient ratings, strengthened SMG's Internet presence and greatly increased website visitor volumes. This web traffic directly translated into more patient traffic coming through the doors of the urgent care facilities.

¹Healthcare Consumer Trends, National Research Corporation, 2015

Bringing immediacy

At NRC Health, we capture what people think and feel about your organization in real-time and over time. Build on what's working, and resolve service issues with greater speed and personalization.

At SMG, this meant moving to a real-time feedback solution that significantly shortened the time between experience and insight as well as reached 100 percent of patients through modern outreach modes.



Patient visit



Within hours, outreach via email or phone



Immediately patient feedback is available to provider

The results

Sentara Medical Group saw significant positive results across the board as a result of its efforts. The first quarter of 2016 saw patient visit volumes increase by 25 percent over the same time period in the previous year. The first quarter also saw patient experience scores increase significantly—by 6.5 percentage points versus the same time period in 2015. And, perhaps most telling: as a result of these changes, the urgent care division of SMG went from losing money to being profitable. To accomplish this goal, they had to escape a deficit of hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Implementing a rapid feedback cycle and embracing performance transparency enabled SMG to shine a light on what was most important to its patients and empower healthcare providers to transform the urgent care experience into one patients could rave about.

A start-up mentality in healthcare

"Healthcare has got to move quicker, be nimble. It's got to innovate. We started with one practice, proved success and quickly rolled it out to the rest."

Dr. Mark Weisman,
Medical Director, SMG



Patient visits increased 25%



Patient experience scores increased by 6.5 percentage points



Feedback lag shortened from weeks to hours



35 times more patient feedback



Financial turnaround achieved

COMMENTS BEFORE NRC HEALTH

"We waited 2.5 hours to see this doctor, which is unacceptable."

"I waited these hours in pain for a four-minute consultation with the doctor."

"I would like to have been informed of the wait time prior to waiting 2+ hours."

COMMENTS AFTER NRC HEALTH

"Keep doing what you are doing. Online sign up, no wait, physician prompt and thorough, even reviewing my chart beforehand."

"Everything was fast and efficient."

"That was so easy."

LEARN MORE

For more on transparency solutions from NRC Health, call 800.388.4264 or visit nrchealth.com.

**NRC Health helps healthcare organizations
better understand the people they care for and
design experiences that inspire loyalty.**