

CASE STUDY



Advancing patient communication with preference-driven changes

When you need to understand...fast

Carilion Clinic had an urgent, organization-wide need for feedback about patient communication. Quick turnaround and custom research provided the answers.

THE CHALLENGE

A tri-purpose need for patient intel

In late fall of 2015, three internal committees at Carilion Clinic raised questions around patient-communication practices and preferences. First, at the executive level, there was interest in learning more about technology implementation at the physician practices—which tools had the most traction with patients? Additionally, a sub-committee of that group had been charged with the creation of phone protocols for Carilion’s call center and physician practices. And in yet another area of the organization, there was interest in learning more about utilization of and satisfaction with the patient portal, *MyChart*, in order to understand how to best improve the tool.

Having recently begun a partnership with NRC Health Market Insights, Carilion’s committees had all of the tools necessary to answer these questions, including the Market Insights On Demand tool, a platform that allows the fielding of custom studies to defined audiences. For this project, Carilion wanted to engage with patients—as many as possible—using a method that was quick, easy, and non-intrusive. For the past few years, *MyChart* adoption had been a major initiative at Carilion, which meant that they already possessed a large pool of patient email addresses from which to collect feedback.¹

KEY FINDINGS

- When selecting a physician, “having a doctor who listens to me” is more important to Carilion patients than any other factor—even high-quality care.
- Patients are okay with waiting for three to four rings before their call is picked up by a live person. More than half say that only one transfer is acceptable before connecting with the right person.
- Appointment reminder preferences:
 - 27%** prefer automated calls
 - 23%** prefer text messages
 - 18%** prefer phone calls from a person
- Patients are generally willing to deal with “phone trees” as long as the number of options is limited to three or four

ABOUT CARILION CLINIC

Carilion Clinic is a non-profit healthcare organization based in Roanoke, VA, consisting of seven hospitals, primary and specialty physician practices, and other complementary services. Carilion provides care to a patient population of nearly one million Virginians.

THE SOLUTION

A custom-built study yields actionable findings

Carilion’s Planning Analyst, Sharon Honaker, partnered closely with NRC Health to design an email-based patient survey that objectively tackled their key research objectives and optimized response rates, and did so in a HIPAA-compliant format. The final survey consisted of 11 questions, aimed at addressing the following research questions:

- Are Carilion’s *MyChart* users satisfied with the service?
- What are patients’ preferences when it comes to communication with their doctors’ offices?
- How does communication in general play a role in selecting a provider?

On December 17, 2015, Carilion gave NRC Health the green light to field the study, which garnered 1,230 patient responses over two weeks. **The results presentation was delivered to the Carilion team on January 6—only 20 days after fielding began.**

- 31%** of Carilion patients say they are “somewhat” or “very” likely to use e-visit technology for common ailments
- 59%** of patients prefer follow-up information and test results to be sent via the patient portal
- 89%** use their patient portal, and they love the ability to communicate with their physicians over the platform
- 59%** of patients say they would prefer to self-schedule their appointments online

BRINGING IMMEDIACY:

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

At Carilion Clinic, this meant creating a focused custom survey to address urgent research objectives, and returning research results in just 20 days. These findings were used to create an informed strategy for patient communications going forward.

THE RESULTS

Immediate impact and further research

The On Demand results were not only presented to the three original requesting committees, but they were also shared with Carilion's call center and ambulatory practices. The impact of the data was immediate.

Tammy Nerenberg, Contact Center Director, said that the information was used to "set the appropriate metric for when calls should be answered at [Carilion] call centers." She noted, "There aren't industry standards related to healthcare call-center metrics...like there are for other [industries]. Having a tangible piece of evidence to support 20 seconds (four rings)...made a huge difference." By enlisting the voice of the consumer in the creation of their policies and standards, Carilion was able to establish their own standards for effective patient communication.

PRIORITIZING MYCHART ENHANCEMENTS

In the spring, Carilion's patient communications team learned that there would be an opportunity to budget for additional *MyChart* features. The first On Demand study confirmed that Carilion's patient population was aware of and using the patient portal, but now Honaker and the team needed to understand what utilization looked like and how they could best allocate resources for future enhancements. Carilion once again collaborated with NRC Health to develop and refine an eight-question survey for its patient panel. NRC Health was able to launch the survey, collect and analyze the results, and compile the results presentation in an expeditious eight-day time period. Responses from 1,237 Carilion patients were collected to achieve the following research objectives:

- Measure the current level and frequency of access for Carilion's *MyChart* tool among users.
- Identify the most-utilized features and understand their value.
- Identify the most-desired enhancement for future development.

The results of this study were twofold: first, results confirmed many themes that were touched upon in the first On Demand study; and second, they provided a clear view of which *MyChart* features patients are using today and what enhancements they would like to have in the future.

The results from the second study inspired internal audiences at Carilion, and have had measurable impact on the primary-care setting. Page Pace, Director of Marketing and Communications, said, "All family and community-medicine practices now offer online scheduling through *MyChart*." Understanding patient preferences enabled Carilion to make the most impactful choices throughout the organization to improve experiences for patients at key moments.

KEY FINDINGS:

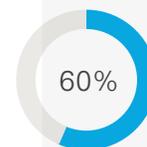
The majority of patients have not used pharmacy refill or educational links in the past year.

Features most heavily used by Carilion patients today:

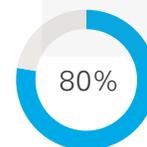
- #1 Accessing results
- #2 Checking for upcoming appointments
- #3 Reviewing past results and history

Tools patients would like to see most in a patient portal:

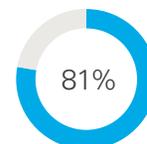
- #1 Ability to review notes from a physician visit
- #2 Open scheduling for future appointments
- #3 Option to complete pre-visit questionnaires and paperwork



of patients are aware of the smartphone application



of patients said that their preferred method of access to the portal is via a desktop or laptop computer



of Carilion patients consider themselves to be "active" users of the patient portal, with more than half of those patients logging in about once a month

LEARN MORE

For more on NRC Health Market Insights, call 800.388.4264 or visit nrchealth.com.

THE NEED FOR SPECIALIZED RESEARCH

Do you remember a time when the sum of your organization's market research was a bi-annual phone survey asking consumers about their awareness, preference, and utilization of hospitals in the area? Is there any chance you're glancing at a shelf of binders housing that research right now? If so, don't worry—you're not alone. Until recently, market research in healthcare has largely been a "check the box" exercise. Are our numbers this year slightly better than last year's? Yes? Great.

This is not to say that analyzing market trends and establishing meaningful benchmarks are not valuable practices. For the past two decades, NRC Health has set the standard for syndicated market research. Drawing a parallel to the physician universe, NRC Health's syndicated market research acts as an organization's general practitioner.

She checks your vitals, reviews your medical history, and is generally on the lookout for any major health-related changes. She's typically the physician who knows you best, so when she notices something that requires the attention of a specialist, you take her recommendation.

To keep up with such a rapidly evolving industry, today's healthcare marketer needs access to a specialist every now and again—or in some cases, a team of them. NRC Health Market Insight's On Demand tool is the answer. On Demand allows marketers access to custom insights from their most important audiences. It's the specialist we all want in our network.

To learn more about NRC Health Market Insights, call 800.388.4264, visit nrchealth.com, or write to info@nrchealth.com.

1 Because the majority of the patient panel was comprised of emails collected during Carilion's *MyChart* adoption campaign, the respondent pool was inherently more "tech-savvy" and more likely to use *MyChart* compared to the total Carilion patient population. Given the research objectives of the following studies, this sample bias was acceptable for the organization. It should be noted that when this case study refers to "% of patients," it is in the context of the patient panel, not of the overall patient population.

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