



Preserving the experience—insights from top patient-experience leaders

Healthcare organizations have met the COVID-19 pandemic with uncanny agility. The solutions they've devised to protect their customers have not only met the needs of the moment—they're likely to reshape the industry for years to come.

Insights from top patient-experience leaders

Many healthcare innovations reflect a new urgency behind some of the industry's emerging trends. The expansion of digital delivery, for instance, and the co-designing of care experiences with customers, patients, and providers have long been a part of health systems' aspirations. The coronavirus has brought them conspicuously to the foreground.

Such a rapid pace of change might feel disorienting for patients and consumers. Healthcare leaders, however, have found a way to balance the unprecedented demands of the crisis with the enduring human needs of their customers. They're leading communities through this crisis with a steady hand, without losing sight of what matters most. They're not only saving patients' lives—they're preserving a fully realized patient experience in the process.

It hardly needs be said that this is a remarkable achievement. For insight into how they did it, here are some patient-experience leaders' accounts, in their own words.

Harris Health System



David Riddle

Administrative Director, Patient Experience

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Harris Health System galvanized our workforce to reinvigorate our commitment to care for the community's most in need. It also inspired greater use of new technologies and innovations to address the future needs of our patients and employees in a post-COVID reality.

In record numbers, our patients can now keep up with their healthcare needs from the comfort of their home. Video, email, and telephone appointments enable our patients to see their trusted medical providers while preserving social distance. The adoption numbers are dramatic. We project that we will convert over 46% of our nearly 800,000 ambulatory-care visits to this platform in the next year.

Additionally, our pharmacy has expanded home delivery of medication. In just two months, we've gone from delivering to 1% of our patients to delivering to over 77%. This amounts to nearly 1.5 million prescriptions directly to clients over the coming year. The combination of reduced wait times, elimination of transportation issues, and overall convenience has created an exemplary patient experience, as well as improved medication adherence.

Our staff is also incorporating more computer tablets, smartphones, and other video technology to help hospitalized patients connect with loved ones, celebrate newborn deliveries, ring in last cancer treatments, and be present for end-of-life patients. Virtual rounding has also been such a success during this outbreak, we plan to continue it after the crisis passes.

Finally, Harris Health has also embraced a new workforce model that promotes healthy telecommuting. We plan to permanently transition 1,400 of our workforce to full-time work-from-home, or to a hybrid model that still maintains a productive, efficient, and dedicated staff.

OHSU



Banning Hendriks

Director, Patient Experience

Throughout these turbulent times, what has become abundantly clear is our need for community and connection. Many elements of our work have changed, and now more than ever, we need everyone's voice at the table to inform how we move forward.

Our current circumstances have served as a catalyst for ensuring the representation of everyone's voice as we redesign how our healthcare system operates. By finding new ways to engage, both patients and staff have gained the ability to connect and participate in work that previously would have been limited due to logistical challenges. We are moving closer to our aspiration, where we collaborate as a community to co-design the future of healthcare.

WellStar



Jessica Daniels, MPA, PMP

Executive Director System Patient Experience

At Wellstar, we are all here to serve. Whether we directly serve our patients and consumers, or we serve our fellow team members, service is part of our everyday lives—and we fully embraced these ideals as our team responded to the COVID-19 crisis. As we look toward the future, Wellstar has three key learnings that we will continue to innovate upon to deliver on our mission to enhance the health and well-being of every person we serve.

First, leveraging technology. We see it as our responsibility to make it easy for patients, families, and caregivers to stay connected during this time, and help reduce the emotional toll associated with these circumstances.

Second, strengthening relationships. We strive to honor every voice, and our Voice of the Customer data reveals that the way people are treated, how they are communicated with, and personalized care continue to be top priorities. The importance of meaningful partnerships with our patients and families became abundantly apparent, and we needed to be more thoughtful about the content and cadence of our interactions with them.

Third, taking a holistic view of the patient's journey. Now more than ever, we have seen the need to break down the silo mentality, and move away from an episodic approach to care delivery, to collaborate differently as a care team. We must look at the flow and experience of our patients across the entire continuum of care, to truly understand how to best meet their needs.

Summit CityMD



K. Calvin Hwang

Chief Experience Officer

When crisis hits, you take in the big picture, decide what's most important, and hone in on that. For Summit CityMD, a vision-driven organization focused on building healthier, kinder communities, that meant ensuring that our people were safe and cared for, both physically and mentally.

Once that was secured, we could continue working to achieve our vision. Now more than ever, our team needs to feel connected to the vision—and that starts with understanding why we do what we do. Luckily, people generally go into healthcare in order to help others, and already have a tendency toward compassion and empathy. Our task was simply to remind everyone that that's the exact reason why this company was founded and what we work toward every day. By understanding this, our workforce can be more engaged in achieving our vision, and deliver the experience we promise to our patients.

Sanford Health



Jennifer Morrison

Senior Executive Director, Patient Experience and Digital Operations

Sanford Health's commitment to providing a higher level of service and exceptional patient care drives everything we do. We have remained dedicated to that commitment, even in the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As case counts began to climb in the communities we serve, we heard what our patients and staff were telling us. There was this understandable apprehension about continuing to receive and provide care in the same ways we always had. We knew we had to act quickly to keep them safe, while also upholding their trust and comfort. We began new safety and screening measures in our clinics and medical centers and we expanded our telemedicine offerings in bold new ways, giving patients options to seek care safely whether within our walls or from the comfort of home.

The challenges posed by COVID-19 have further highlighted for us the importance of listening to our patients in real time, so we can pivot to meet their needs and expectations. As we work to find our new normal and continue to navigate the changes facing the healthcare industry, the voices of those we serve will remain at the center of it all.

Cedars-Sinai



Alan Dubovsky

Chief Patient Experience Officer

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Cedars-Sinai has continued to offer advanced, high-quality care in all of our inpatient and ambulatory locations, while ensuring that patients feel comforted whether they are cared for in person or via our growing menu of virtual options.

Because of COVID-19, we accelerated our transition to virtual care alternatives—such as video visits and telemedicine—that have proven extraordinarily popular with our patients. Our move to fully embrace virtual health has made it easier for patients to continue receiving safe, high-quality care at a time when many have been reluctant to visit the hospital. We have launched a new patient survey to capture feedback on virtual visits, which have given us new insight into the many creative ways we have to better serve our patients.

Going forward, as we remind patients not to delay care, our focus will also be on reminding our staff that they work in a safe environment and that we're all in this together. We will provide tools and resources for this new way of interacting with patients, such as scripting and coaching for virtual care, as well as guidance for the new in-person medical experience that stresses physical distancing, temperature checks and other public-health strategies to keep both providers and patients safe.

Orlando Health



Ken Kozielski

Vice President, Customer Experience

COVID-19 has confirmed that Orlando Health is on the right path to define our approach to care and build relationships with our customers. As the crisis was unfolding, we hosted a webinar with about 100 of our ED physicians. I kicked it off by asking them if they were spending more effort treating disease or treating fear. The response was unanimous: fear, misinformation, and uncertainty were far and away the more challenging patient concerns for these physicians. Furthermore, they were confident in their training and experience when it came to treating disease, but removing fear was not something they had been taught in school.

Our model for building relationships gives us the principles to engage with patients in this new normal. Now emboldened with input from these physicians, we are taking quick action to remove fear. We launched a COVID-19 hotline to be a single source of truth and dispel misinformation. We fast-tracked a virtual-visit platform for patients to get the care they need without risking a visit to the office. We sourced iPads for isolated inpatients to use to communicate with their families. We are partnering with local businesses to define best practices for reopening their doors safely. As we turn our sights to restarting our economy, it is not enough to merely keep the COVID out; we must give people the confidence to come back in.

A NOTE OF GRATITUDE

In the heat of a crisis, each of these institutions protected patient safety without compromising on the humanity of the care encounter. Their examples are edifying and inspiring.

They have much to teach us, not just in the nimbleness and acuity of their responses, but in the spirit that informed their work. They've found a way to preserve a human-centered vision of care during the most stressful and dangerous period of their careers.

And as the industry navigates through this new normal, we have every confidence that organizations will continue to show the same resilience, innovation, and compassion that defined their work during the pandemic.



For more than 39 years, NRC Health (NASDAQ: NRC) has been committed to achieving human understanding and bringing healthcare organizations closer to their customers than ever before by illuminating and improving the key moments that define an experience and build trust. Guided by their uniquely empathic heritage, proprietary methods, skilled associates, and holistic approach, NRC Health helps their customers design experiences that exceed expectations, inspire loyalty, and improve well-being among patients, residents, physicians, nurses, and staff.

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