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Healthcare Companies Should Design Patient Experiences Like Customer Experiences

It's been years since the healthcare industry started talking about the "patient experience," but it still has a long way to go to catch up to what most people want and expect from them. And there are a host of start-ups, including [Circle Medical Group of California](#), that just might overtake the industry and disrupt it the way Uber has in the taxi business. The problem is that healthcare companies should design patient experiences like companies design customer experiences, but they're not. Instead they continue to operate with a provider- and payer-driven approach.

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Patient experiences should be like customer experiences, but they're not. (Photo by Joe Raedle/Getty Images)

Consider some of my recent healthcare experiences:

- The antiquated search functionality on my insurance provider's website made it impossible to find online a primary care doctor and a specialist within a 15-minute drive of my home.

So I spent about an hour calling different offices and locations before I gave up and succumbed to making appointments at very inconvenient location.

- Upon arriving at a medical center for a couple of routine procedures, I was sent to different check-in stations and at each was given multiple forms to fill out manually even though I had inputted all my information online beforehand.

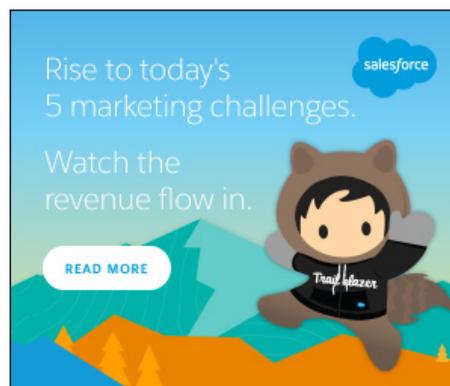
- After receiving a voicemail from a provider that required me to call them back, I called the office and was asked to provide my phone number and date of birth (not my name) so they could locate my record.

- I spent valuable time making/receiving several phone calls back and forth between the office and me regarding some basic information they were missing.

A few years ago I probably wouldn't have thought twice about these inconveniences, hassles, and wasted time. But now, I see that my experience as a healthcare patient falls well short of what I expect and get from every other company or organization I interact with (with the exception of government institutions like the USPS and IRS.) My expectations have been elevated — I call it the Uber-fication everything. I expect to get what I want, when I want it, where I want it, and how I want it, all at the push of a button. And from grocery stores to banks to technology providers to personal trainers, most businesses are working toward meeting that expectation. Forrester Research [reports](#) that 72% of businesses say improving customer experience is their top priority.

But not healthcare organizations. For example, only 43% of doctor's practices [surveyed](#) by The Beryl Institute say that improving the patient experiences is among their top three priorities (nearly an equal percentage, 39%, say reducing and managing costs is.) So it's no wonder patients remain unsatisfied and frustrated.

It's also not surprising that a new crop of start-ups have take on the mission to improve — and in some cases, completely transform — the patient experience. Companies such as Heal,



MedZed, Dr. On Demand, and Pager have started to offer alternatives to the slow, inconvenient, antiquated healthcare establishment.

I personally had a terrific experience [Circle Medical](#) which started up in 2015 after its founders including George Favvas and David Kagan took their concept through the [Y Combinator](#) start-up accelerator program and raised \$2.9 million in their first round of funding. Circle Medical uses a mobile app to serve and communicate with its patients. Through it, you can set up your insurance by scanning your insurance card, find a doctor and make an appointment, chat with your doctor, receive appointment summaries, and check your insurance co-pays and deductibles. The practice's primary care doctors are available 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. seven days a week and they make house calls for no extra charge. Circle Medical is in-network for almost all insurance companies in California and integrates with other providers including hospitals and pharmacies. I will never use any other healthcare provider unless I have to.

Circle Medical and other healthcare start-ups are primed to disrupt the healthcare industry because they design the patient experience the way companies design customer experiences:

Healthcare disruptors start with the patient, not the provider or payer. The existing healthcare system is beholden to providers — primarily doctors who are revered as experts who give patients the privilege of their care — and payers — insurance companies and employers who exert their power because they control the purse strings. But patients need to be considered the most important and most powerful players in the system — it's their health and they're the reason the industry exists in the first place. Just as the most successful companies are those that have adopted a customer-centric approach, healthcare organizations need to put patients at the center of their operations — segmenting them into discrete groups, understanding their needs and expectations, and designing care and solutions to make their lives better.

Healthcare disruptors understand it's about the entire experience, not just the care provided. Businesses have learned that

it's no longer enough to provide a quality product at a fair price with decent service. Those are table stakes. Customers — and patients — want and expect more. They are looking for seamless solutions, intuitive interfaces, on-demand services, and personalized interactions.

Healthcare disruptors recognize that their service delivery depends on an ecosystem of organizations, technologies, devices, and other stakeholders. So they take responsibility for the patient experience across the entire ecosystem and work hard to integrate and standardize all the moving parts. Retailers are now responsible for their logistics providers, automotive companies now co-create solutions with technology platforms, entertainment companies now partner with media channels — so, healthcare providers should now be integrated with all the players that impact the patient experience.

Commercial enterprises have made customer experience a priority because they recognize that their customers have a choice — and will choose to do business with the company that does the best job of engaging them. Healthcare organizations need to realize that patients now have a choice too

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