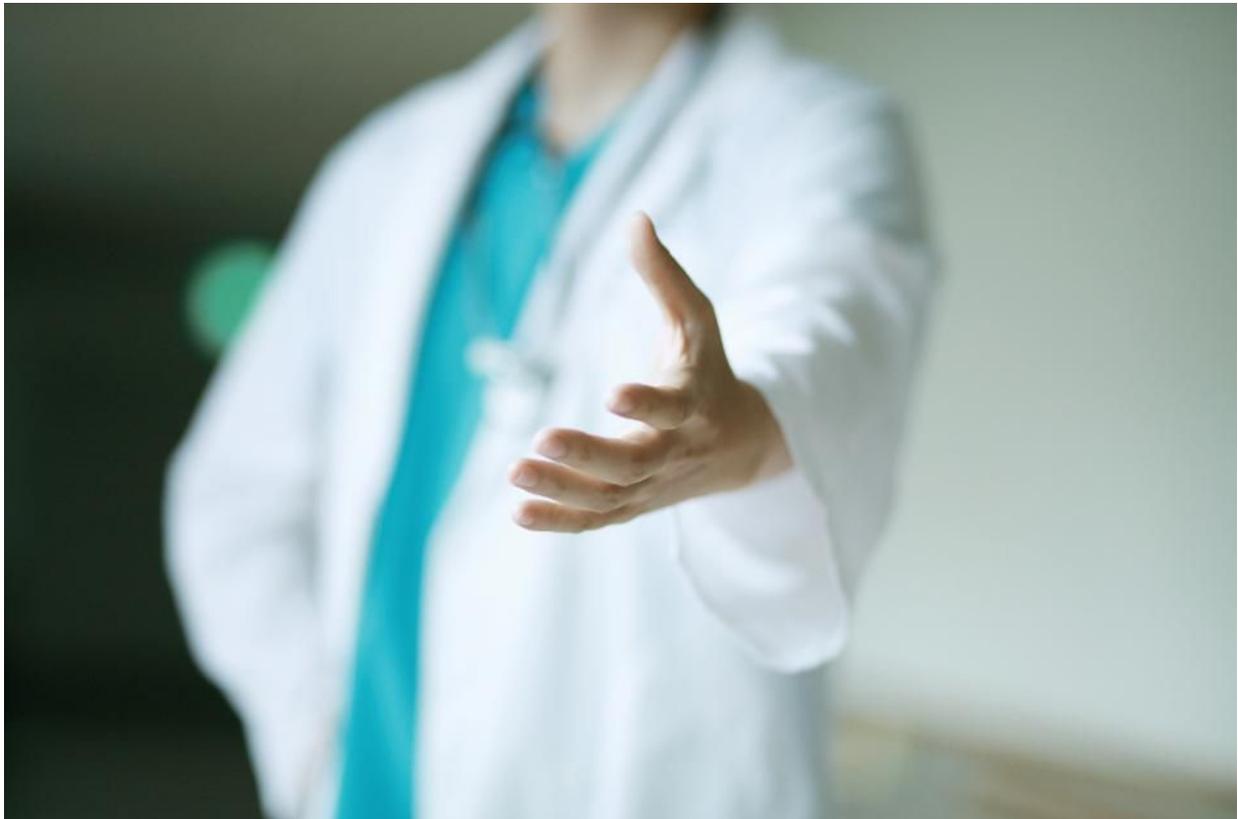


What Patients Really Want And Why Healthcare Companies Should Care

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In celebration of CX Day, the day the CXPA (Customer Experience Professionals Association) has designated to shine a spotlight on customer experience, I am sharing new insights about a type of customer experience that is growing in importance – the healthcare patient experience (PX). PX deserves attention as changes in reimbursements are leading to more patient choice, the U.S. population ages and healthcare becomes a more regular part of our daily lives, and as technology and innovation are disrupting all aspects of healthcare.



Patients are looking for healthcare providers to acknowledge their humanity in the patient experience (PX).

The analysts at The Beryl Institute recently released findings from research they conducted on PX, including focus groups followed by online survey of 2,000 healthcare consumers in five countries. Their report, Consumer Perspectives on Patient Experience 2018, reveals what patients really want and why healthcare companies need to pay attention. They show that while those in the healthcare industry may be concerned with quality of care and extending compassion and empathy through the care they provide for patients, patients are looking for healthcare providers to acknowledge their humanity and change the nature of the interactions involved in clinical encounters to make them more human.

PX Is Important to Practically Everyone

The Beryl Institute's research found that over 90% of respondents believe PX to be important, with 59% saying it is "extremely important." People reported the primary reason why PX is important is because "my health and well-being are important to me." While this finding may not be surprising, the researchers observe, "This data point in itself reinforces the unique and significant nature of healthcare. It is personal, and it is important." And PX is only going to become more important to more people as they get older and have more needs for healthcare.

PX is also important because people's expectations have been raised in other areas of their lives such as retail and hospitality. I wrote about this last year, saying that most healthcare organizations continue to operate with a provider- and payer-driven approach, when they should be modeling PX after customer experiences in other sectors. Even though people don't see themselves as customers in a healthcare setting, The Beryl Institute found that patients have come to expect "an experience that treats them in certain ways and acknowledges who they are as people in the process." The Beryl Institute concludes, "Leading healthcare would be naïve to think they are not being compared to those other experiences people are having."

What Patients Really Want

The researchers wanted to understand what PX really means to consumers of healthcare, so they asked respondents to what extent they believed various areas were part of patient experience and what was important to them. They found that people's definition of PX represents the integrated nature of a healthcare encounter. It's the sum of all interactions someone has across the continuum of care, "across touchpoints and transitions, in quality, safety and service efforts, in the implications of cost and the issue of access," The Beryl Institute reports.

The most important aspect of having a good PX, they found, is that the people providing care "listen to you," with 71% saying this is "extremely important" and 24% more saying it is "very important." That care providers "communicate clearly in a way you can understand" and "treat you with courtesy and respect" were also rated by 95% as extremely or very important. This suggests that being treated as people is the highest priority for patients.

The other aspects that were rated as highly important for healthcare providers to do, such as "gives you confidence in their abilities," "take your pain seriously," and "provide a clear plan of care and why they are doing it," reinforce the importance of the personal and human connection in PX. Also "a healthcare environment that is clean and comfortable," "the ability to schedule an appointment or procedure within a reasonable time period," and "a discharge/ check out process in which your treatment plan and/or next steps in care are clearly explained," were rated high in importance.

Patients Want to See Compassion and Empathy in Action

Together, these PX drivers raise a distinction that healthcare organizations must address, The Beryl Institute says. They note that, “The use of language used in healthcare such as ‘patient-centeredness’ where the terminology and the practice seems to represent a view from the inside out, that is healthcare organizations say they should be patient-centric or provide empathy and compassion, but what consumers want are the *tangible* actions that exemplify those practices.” (*emphasis mine.*) In fact, “express empathy and compassion” was rated lower in importance (84%). This clearly indicates that people don’t want healthcare providers to say they are compassionate or empathetic, they want healthcare providers to *listen* and *act* in ways that clearly demonstrate they care and understand.

Healthcare organizations should also note that more than two-thirds of respondents rated a very or extremely important aspects of the environment including “a healthcare facility in which you can find your way around easily (e.g. clear signage, information, etc.)” and “a healthcare facility that offers convenient parking.” This reinforces the point that people expect from healthcare the same level of delivery on basic experience drivers they get elsewhere – and these fundamentals contribute to a PX that truly meets patients’ needs.

PX Matters

The Beryl Institute asked people what they or someone they knew did as a result of having both positive and negative healthcare experiences. For positive experiences, 73% -- the highest percentage -- responded that they would “continue to use the same doctor or organization.” This suggests that PX has the potential to increase loyalty and influence patient choice.

The top reported action following a negative experience (76%) was that people said they would tell others – this far outweighed any other response to a negative experience and is similar to the percent of people who say they would share with others about a positive experience (70%). Together these findings indicate that that people are telling the stories about their experience, good or bad, in at least 7 of every 10 healthcare encounters. The Beryl Institute concludes, “This is perhaps one of the most significant brand opportunities for healthcare organizations today...Healthcare organizations should be asking themselves, ‘What is the story we look to create in the experience we provide and what we want others to tell about us?’.”

The Bottom Line

The Beryl Institute report includes other insights about how people view PX, including differences and similarities between respondents of different generations and from different countries. The overall conclusion from all the findings, though, comes back to the need for healthcare organizations to understand that people are not just passive participants in a care transaction or simply recipients of care, and they don’t want to be treated as such. Rather, the researchers say, patients are “partners in a care conversation, who must be acknowledged and cared for as people in a healthcare experience.” Understanding this and designing PX to address it requires a fundamental mindset shift among healthcare providers.

I’ll let The Beryl Institute have the last word on why healthcare companies must address PX:

“Experience is not something to be taken for granted, it is not just an idea at the softer edges of healthcare, but rather it sits at its heart and has significant impact and serious implications for how healthcare is led into the future.”