Healthcare providers have succeeded in making administrative tasks easier and more convenient for patients. Patients can pay bills online, and they get appointment reminders by email or text (see Figure 1). But 2019 will be about making significant strategic investments in patient experience so it changes behavior and improves outcomes—a critical goal as the industry turns toward paying more for value, not volume. Some healthcare organisations also will begin to use patient experience to differentiate themselves in the market.

Chinese perspective—Technology empowers the entire medical treatment process: Led by the improvement of Internet technology in China, the patient experience has made more convenient and efficient. The new model of “finger tip medical treatment” offers the ability to quickly register, minimize time in long queues to see a doctor, improving convenience and satisfaction. Digital hospital applications usually integrate functions such as pre-patient appointment registration and information inquiry, payment, as well as post-medical health information. In some areas, with the development of Big Data in the healthcare industry in China, patients will have more precise medical services, efficient disease diagnosis and management in the future.

Forty-nine percent of provider executives said revamped the patient experience is one of their organisation’s top three priorities over the next five years. Many already have or are building the role of chief patient experience officer. Some healthcare organisations are beginning to use patient experience as their key differentiator in the market.

Chinese perspective-Innovation and transformation in medical system: Driven by deepening healthcare reform in China, China’s healthcare system nationally allocates resources through regional health alliances, the tier system and doctor’s multi-sited practicing. Echoing what consumer organisations do with their consumers, Chinese medical institutions are focusing on patient experience by establishing internal management mechanisms, such as setting up patient experience centres and patient committees, providing effective channels of hearing (and acting on) the patient perspective, their needs, complaints and growing expectations.

Our China patient survey of 1000 patients said that convenience is very important with many abandoning health related appointments due to time constraints. Outcomes are better understanding the patient journey and pain-points (including data) building a better brand image, streamlining processes and improving the hospital environment. They emphasise that patient experience reflected in performance indicators also reinforces the determination to improve patient satisfaction. Knowing the patient journey and mapping the patient experience or PX provides health providers the edge in this area.

Delivering a better experience pays in CMS’ new value-based payment scheme under the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act (MACRA). Provider reimbursements will be based in part on patient engagement efforts such as promoting self-management and coaching patients between. But organisations have traditionally built patient experience efforts around the industry’s satisfaction surveys and measured performance based on satisfaction scores, service volume and revenue. Though they’re important, these measurements don’t get to the root of what patients value most or what motivates them to get and stay healthy. Just as retailers have harnessed data’s power to understand consumer behavior, healthcare organisations must obtain a 360-degree view of patients to engage them and get a return on their investments. “An ability to derive meaningful information from linking disparate data about patients becomes a differentiator for an organisation in a competitive market,” said Winnie Miao, executive vice president and chief experience officer at THR, who also is handling THR’s systems integration efforts.

Measures that can help organisations understand patients more completely include supplementing demographic profiles with information on the preferences and social circumstances that shape patients’ everyday health decisions. These include cultural values, work and home commitments and neighborhood dynamics. Acolade, a company that helps employees and health plan members navigate the health system, uses machine learning to find patterns in the information patients provide and use that knowledge to predict behaviors.

Eighty-eight percent of insurers are investing in technology to improve the member experience. Humana’s analytics, for example, can predict a member’s fall risk and help create interventions. “These members might not have ventured outside of their home independently before, because they feared they would have a fall,” said Vinip Gopal, Ph.D., enterprise vice president of clinical analytics at Humana. “But now they go out because they have the confidence that someone will be alerted immediately if they do fall, giving them mobility and much needed sense of security.”

Patients generate reams of data about their lives through wearables, pharmaceutical apps and spending habits. But providers say they lack the data to understand different patient segments and struggle to aggregate data from multiple sources.

Chinese perspective—Expansion of eco-system of patient service industry: Convergent industries, from the internet and technology, innovation and real estate have left into the healthcare industry, leveraging their strengths of brand, customer base, data, service and technical capabilities. They aim to expand and deepen a converged industrial chain centred on the improvement of patient experience by building an eco-system. For example, one financial insurance group in China is providing a more complete one-stop, end to end service and quality experience for patients by building online and offline platforms to provide services such as health consultation, health monitoring, remote diagnosis, offline medical treatment and online drug purchases.

The number of start-ups and unicorns in China addressing the needs of patients through health apps for chronic disease, wifi scales, telemedicine, biometric sensors and other innovations will continue to grow, and in encouraged to make the patient experience outside of the clinical area better.

Implications

Make every interaction count.

Connect data points across and beyond the organisation to understand how the patient’s experience fits into your business. “Improving overall patient experience will require strong organisational strategies around bringing in disparate data sets, governing them, establishing ownership, and utilizing them to provide real-time, actionable information about the patient,” THR’s Miao told HRI. “This includes connecting experience measures to utilisation data to help organisations bring dissatisfied patients back, and to help focus investments on services that will increase patient satisfaction.

Invest in patient self-tools with operating models.

Educate patients and clinicians on how to use the tools, integrate them into care, and manage the data they generate. “As a physician, I need a framework so that I’m not putting more burden on my patients. We need a service or take yet another action,” said Dr. Ivor Horn, chief medical officer at Acolade. “We have to consider how we can use tools that fit into the life flow of the consumer, in a way that works for them and creates an experience they want. It shouldn’t be about how the consumer fits into our process.”

Marry workforce and patient experience.

Seventy-three percent of provider executives say balancing patient satisfaction and employee job satisfaction is a barrier to efforts to improve the patient experience. But the two have the potential to go hand in hand. The Cleveland Clinic saw major improvements in patient experience measures after conducting programs to engage employees in the mission of caregiving.