

UNC Health Exceeds Call Center Goals and Raises Referral Conversions by 45%



Based in Chapel Hill, UNC Health is a non-profit, owned by the state of North Carolina.

- Established in 1998
- 14 hospitals and 18 hospital campuses statewide
- 5000 healthcare providers
- EHR: Epic

Renowned health system UNC Health used Artera to improve call center goals by 15%, leading to lower staff stress and increased morale.

UNC Health (UNCH) is an integrated health care system comprised of many locations across North Carolina, including the UNC Hospitals at Chapel Hill. Before implementing Artera™ in June 2020 for appointment reminders, recalls, and some referrals outreach, UNCH used MyChart and phone calls, as well as the services of a digital communication vendor for one-way patient communications. However, the vendor did not meet all of UNCH's needs. For example, its robo dialer could not provide real-time data exchange, the vendor required a six week turnaround for any changes, and the texting system had a character limit.

Velaire Elliott, Healthcare System Manager, Access and Clinical Integration, explains why UNCH chose to switch to the Artera platform:

"Artera brings additional functionality to the table. With our last vendor, we didn't have the opportunity to engage in text messaging with our patients. We didn't have the ability to look at improving our referrals outreach or doing any of the additional communications that we can do with the Artera platform. We wanted to have those capabilities to be able to offer a better experience to our patients."

The Results

↑75%

Referral conversion rate increased from 30% to consistently averaging a high of 75% every month

↑13.4%

Customer satisfaction increased by 13.4% for two critical access measures

↑15%

Call center staff improved internal goals by 15%

Rheumatology uses Artera to increase referral conversion rate by 45%

At the beginning of 2021, UNCH received a high volume of referrals because of business growth, however, it did not have more staff to schedule appointments. Therefore, UNCH expected to see a decrease

in its referral conversion rate. At UNCH, referral conversion is the ability to receive a referral order and convert it into a scheduled appointment.

"A referral is only as good as the appointment that it generates. From the date that the referral is ordered, we want to see an appointment scheduled within three weeks," Elliott said.

In January 2021, the rheumatology department implemented Artera to assist with referral conversion. With Artera two-way messaging, UNCH was able to text its patients about setting up a referral appointment, and patients could instantly text or call back. This type of outreach proved more effective than sending messages through MyChart or leaving phone voicemails that may not be heard.

After three months of using Artera, UNCH Rheumatology improved their referral conversion rate from a disappointing 30% to consistently averaging a high of 75% every month. In August 2021, the rheumatology department twice reached the UNCH system-level goal of 85%.

Tammy Jones, Administrative Support Supervisor said, "We get so many referrals completed in a day now because of Artera texting."

Inbound volume to call center declines 1000 to 2000 calls per month after using Artera

UNCH sets phone service level goals for all front desk and scheduling staff that measures how quickly they can answer the phone. The expectation is that 80% of the time, staff will answer the phone within 30 seconds. Before Artera, the call center staff only achieved this goal 65% of the time. After using Artera, the staff not only achieved the 80% goal but exceeded it, reaching an all-time high of 93% of calls answered within 30 seconds.

"We get so many referrals completed in a day now because of Artera texting"

Tammy Jones

Administrative Support Supervisor

One of the biggest selling points for Artera to the rheumatology staff has been that Artera is an effective and efficient tool for patient conversations. After Artera was implemented, UNCH began to consistently experience a decrease in the number of incoming phone calls. Elliott said, "A decrease in phone calls is really important from a staff perspective because they say, 'That makes a difference in my day-to-day work. If I'm answering 1,000 or 2,000 fewer phone calls every month, that makes a huge difference.'"

Staff morale increases as stress levels decrease

In addition, UNCH found staff morale increased thanks to more efficient workflows and reduced workloads. Jones reports, "My staff was really stressed because there wasn't enough time in the day to get everything done. Now with the calls decreasing, they can use that time to complete other required assignments."

Phone service level and referral conversion rate are two measures UNCH uses to gauge if it is providing good access to its patients. Elliott said, "With the Artera platform, we're actually able to see these measures improving. I think together, these measures tell a really nice story for the patient experience. It's no longer a dance-off, but more like the waltz." Additionally, in the ease of scheduling appointments and ease of contacting access measures, UNCH received a 13.4% increase in customer satisfaction.



Artera to be implemented throughout UNCH to lower staff workload

With the success of Artera already proven in multiple departments, UNCH's next priority is to implement Artera throughout the rest of the healthcare system. Other enhancements include using

Artera rescheduling to instantly rebook canceled appointments and broadcast messaging for weather-related closures. UNCH is also planning to use Artera to help prepare patients for virtual visits to eliminate the need for staff to call patients to walk them through the technical preparation process for a telehealth appointment.

"Artera has set us apart. Our ability to directly communicate to patients in their preferred method is huge. It really makes a difference."

Velaire Elliott

Healthcare System Manager, Access and Clinical Integration

UNCH also will be adding Artera™ ChatAssist AI, a new functionality that uses Natural Language Understanding (NLU) to automate conversations between patients and providers, alerting staff to intervene only when needed. ChatAssist AI is the natural next step in UNCH's ultimate goal to alleviate staff workload.

Elliott sums it up, "Artera sets us apart, especially in the Research Triangle where we have multiple world-class healthcare systems. Our ability to directly communicate to patients in their preferred method is huge. It really makes a difference."

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