

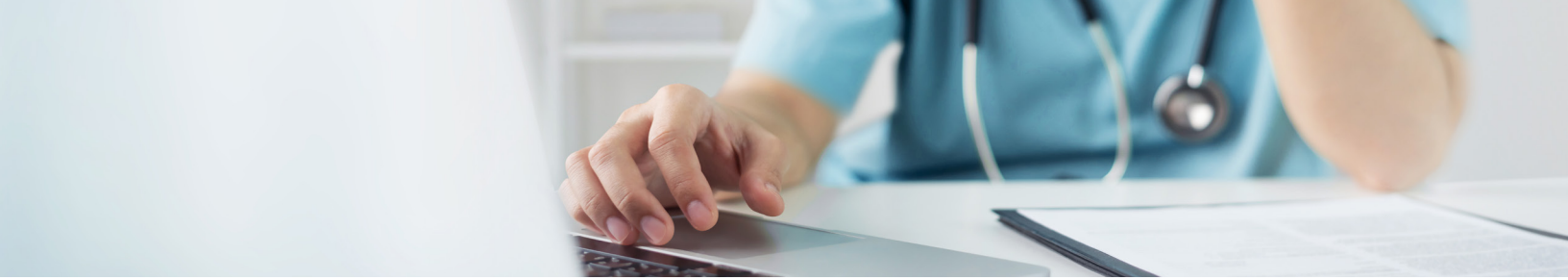


STUDY

Clinical Support Staff Burnout Linked to Patient Communication Challenges

October 2021





Executive Summary

Reaching out, responding to and reassuring patients at every turn during COVID-19 — whether about how to join a telehealth visit or new waiting room protocols — have increased the workload and stress of clinical support staff.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, many clinical support staff had to manage antiquated patient communications systems (e.g., robocalls) that frustrated patients and failed to deliver the positive experience provider organizations desired.

Unfortunately, both patients and staff have lost — and continue to lose — valuable time due to these outdated ways of communicating, such as holding for minutes on end, playing ongoing phone tag or missing each other altogether. COVID-19 has exacerbated these situations — jeopardizing patient health and experience, as well as staff well-being.

A new WELL™ Health study of 320 frontline clinical support staff, all of whom communicate and coordinate directly with patients outside of the office, found:

- 88% report moderate to extreme burnout, with more than half (56%) rating it on the high to extreme end.
- 82% believe the patient communications process is a direct cause of their burnout. A majority of survey respondents (96%) indicate phone-based communication is their primary method of patient communication.
- Nearly two-thirds (63%) report they've considered quitting or switching jobs because of the stress caused by patient-communication processes.

These startling results come at a critical time for providers who are struggling to keep up with the continuing pandemic in addition to difficulty recruiting in a tight labor market. In the wake of new variant outbreaks and pandemic uncertainty, providers are leaning on their clinical support staff more than ever. Compounding the problem is pressure to maintain care quality which is tied directly to reimbursement through payer value-based models.

While much has been reported on doctor and nurse burnout, less attention has been paid to the frontline clinical support staff who have been working tirelessly throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure high-quality patient care was maintained. From the massive amount of patient communication needed to make the shift to virtual care, to their extraordinary efforts in coordinating multifaceted vaccine appointments, clinical support staff are the unsung heroes of the pandemic.

Study Focus

WELL Health conducted a study to better understand the state of patient communications today and its impact on clinical support staff. The study focused on the following three areas:



- 1 The impact of patient communications on clinical support staff stress levels and job satisfaction



- 2 Which part of the patient communications process impacts clinical support staff the most

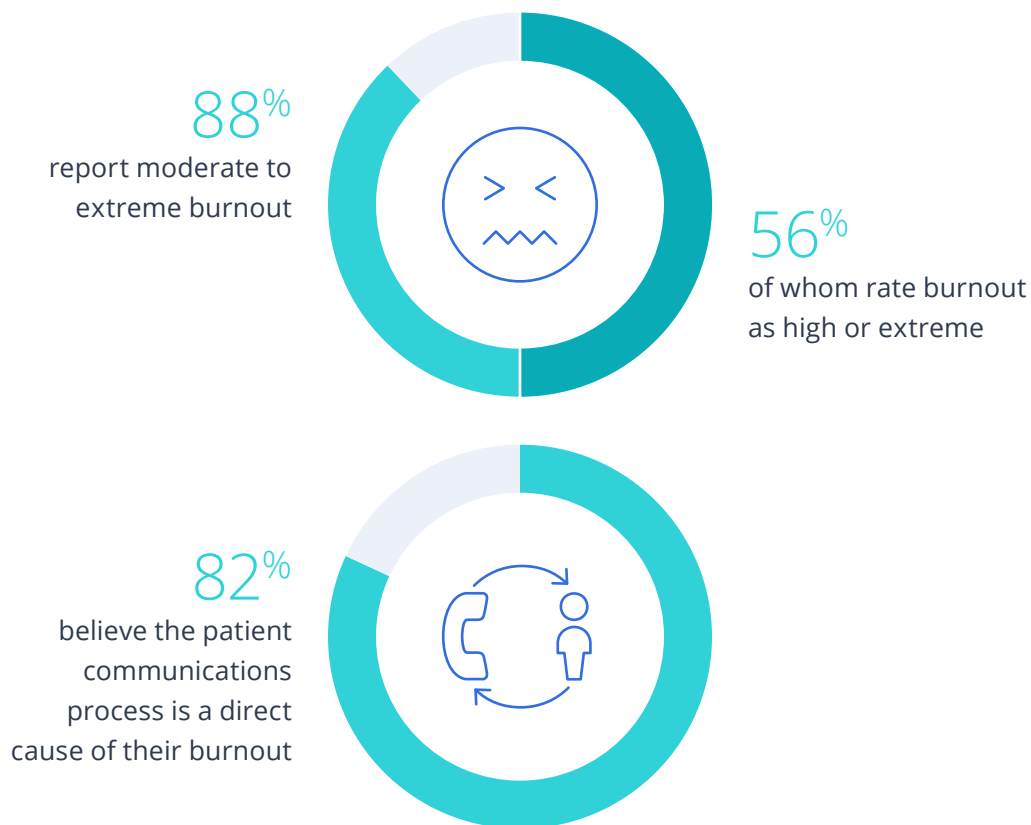


- 3 How the patient communications process impacts patient care quality and health outcomes

For the purposes of this study, the patient communications process is defined as communicating and coordinating with patients about their appointments, follow-ups, and health issues via phone, email, text, live chat, or other communication channels used by the provider office.



Clinical Support Staff Are Overwhelmed and Burned Out — Reporting Patient Communications Is a Direct Cause





WHICH PART OF THE PATIENT COMMUNICATION PROCESS OVERWHELMS STAFF?



96%
of survey respondents
say that phone-based
communication is their
primary method of
patient communication



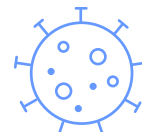
63%

spend at least three
hours each day on the
phone



82%

report frustration
communicating and coordinating
with patients over the phone —
more than half (54%) report their
frustration is consistent



49%

say COVID-19
has made their
frustration worse



Patient Health and Experience at Risk

Years of research shows that clinical burnout puts patient health and experience at risk. However, it's not just the well-being of physicians and nurses that impact patients.

The study uncovered that many clinical support staff perceive their burnout — caused specifically by communication challenges — as negatively affecting the quality of patient care.

With providers increasingly entering value-based contracts with payers, quality of care and patient experience have never been more important.

CLINICAL SUPPORT STAFF BURNOUT AND PATIENT COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES AFFECT PATIENT CARE



63%

report patients notice their burnout



58%

believe that their burnout has negatively affected a patient's quality of care

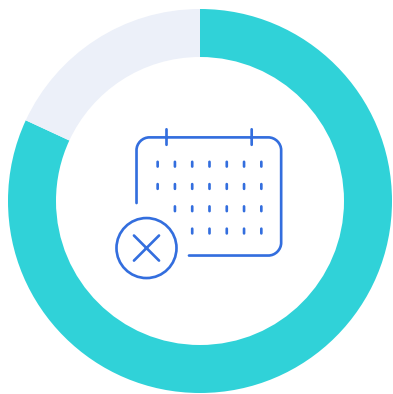


60%

report that poor or ineffective patient communication has negatively affected a patient's health outcome



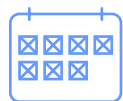
Missed Appointments Caused by Patient Communication Challenges



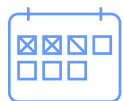
82%
report appointments are missed every week due to miscommunication

Missed appointments can negatively impact patient health — such as worsening of an illness or poor management of a chronic disease — and have economic consequences for providers.

HOW OFTEN DO PATIENTS MISS APPOINTMENTS DUE TO MISCOMMUNICATION?



22%
report daily



34%
report 2 – 3x
a week



26%
report 1x
a week

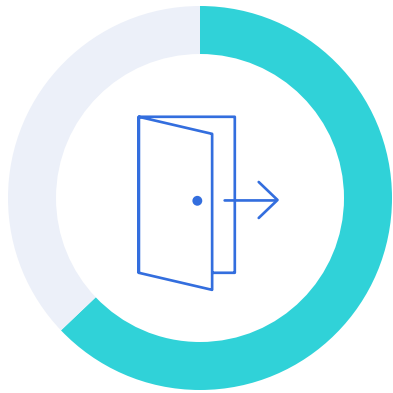


18%
report rarely



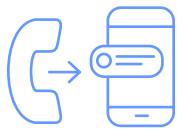
Patient communication challenges impact patient care and a provider's bottom line.

Patient Communication Challenges Negatively Impact Job Satisfaction



63%

of clinical support staff surveyed report they have considered quitting or switching jobs because of the stress caused by patient communication processes



88%

say it would help with their job if certain patient communications were automated and/or had a template

Attracting and retaining talent is a top priority for healthcare providers, especially during COVID-19. As staff continue to grapple with the increased workload, as well as the physical and mental challenges of the pandemic, it is more important than ever that providers consider patient communications technology that help make staff more productive, efficient, and ultimately happy.



The Silver Lining

STAFF ARE SPEAKING UP ABOUT BURNOUT AND SOME MANAGEMENT ARE RESPONDING

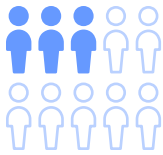
70%
have reported
their mental health
challenges to their
supervisors



The good news?

80%

of those who discussed their
mental health challenges
with management said that
management took some
efforts to improve their
situation



3 in 10 who are experiencing mental health challenges aren't discussing their stress with management, putting themselves, the provider organization and patients at risk.



Prevent and Mitigate Staff Burnout With Digital Patient Communication Technology

Ineffective phone-based communications is one of the contributing factors to clinical support staff burnout. To combat this growing trend, health systems should consider leveraging the latest patient communication innovations to reduce clinical staff burnout and improve patient care.

Here are key factors to look for when considering a patient communications technology solution:

- **Meet patients where they are**
Connect securely with patients anywhere, anytime (and in real-time) through today's most accessible communication: text messaging.
- **Unify patient communications with a platform-level solution**
Ensure various patient touchpoints — sent via text, email, phone and live chat — are connected into a single conversation thread. This way, staff can have one cohesive view of the patient's communication history across their digital health ecosystem.
- **Empower clinical support staff**
Enable staff to quickly customize and disseminate messaging — without relying on IT tickets or third-party vendors — so they can quickly engage patients in real-time.
- **Prioritize security**
Look for vendors who are committed to deploying and enforcing the latest information security frameworks and are HITRUST certified.
Provide support staff with key messages and more information about patient security so they are fully equipped to handle patient inquiries.

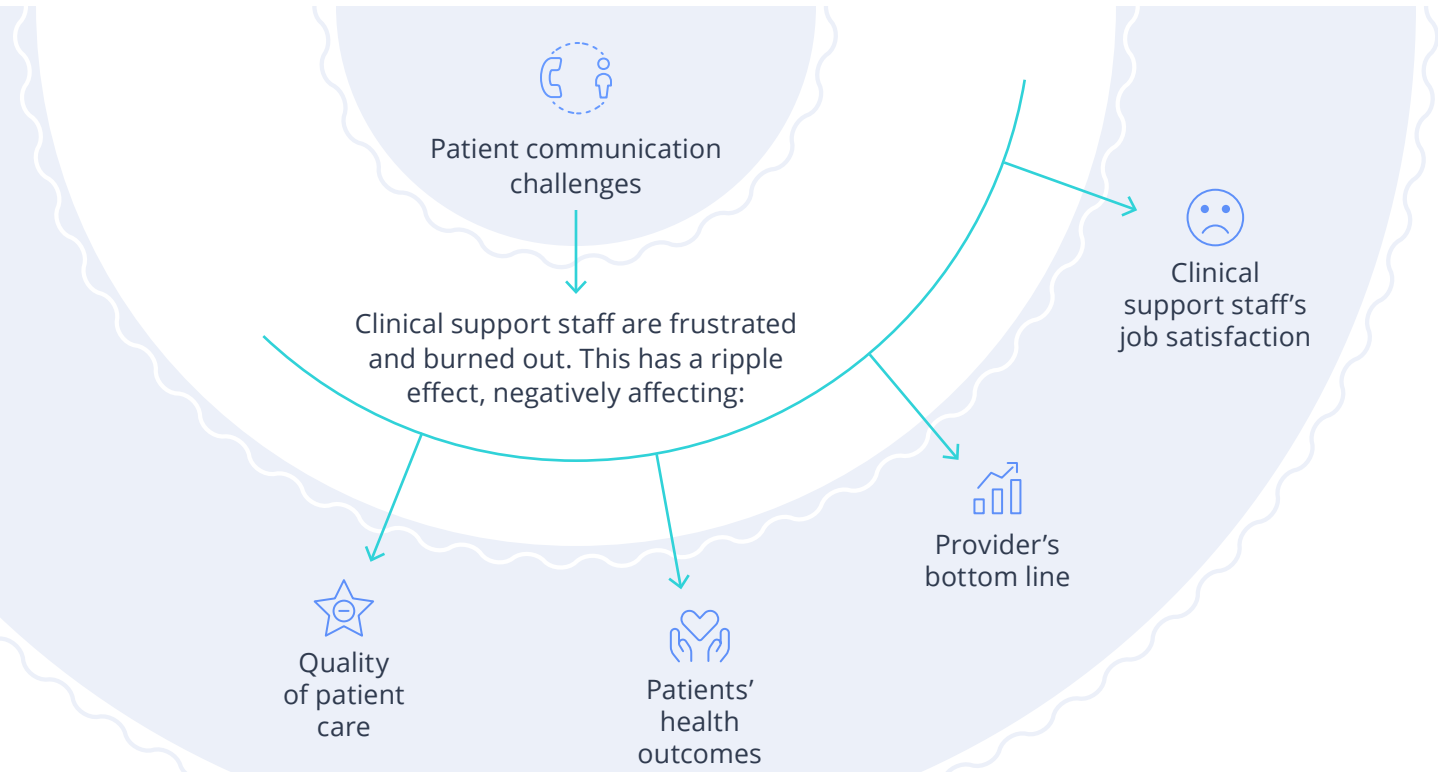


67%

of respondents said patients ask about the security of their patient communication.

The Ripples of Burnout

PATIENT COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES CAN HAVE A RIPPLE EFFECT



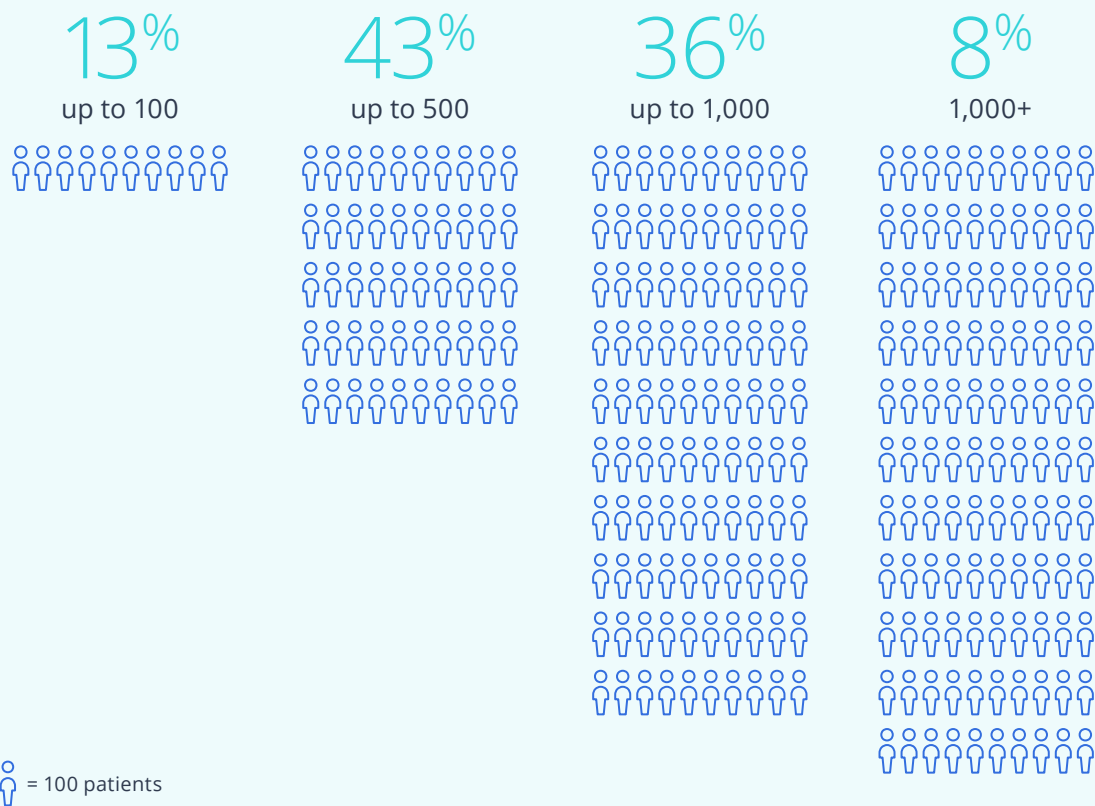
Study Methodology

The survey was conducted by PureSpectrum, an independent market research platform that gathers insights via online, nonprobability samples collected from panels in the PureSpectrum Marketplace. For more information on PureSpectrum's methodology, visit purespectrum.com.

The Respondents

320 frontline clinical support staff who communicate and coordinate directly with patients outside of the office.

HOW MANY PATIENTS THEY TREATED WEEKLY:



Our Expertise



MICHAEL ANTONOFF

Michael is the Director of Data Science at WELL Health. Prior to WELL, Michael was the Executive Director, Enterprise Business and Data Services at The University of Texas, MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, Texas. Michael holds a Master of Business Administration from Rice University and a Bachelor of Science in Computer Information Systems from Purdue University.



MEG ARANOW

Meg is the Platform Evangelist at WELL Health. Before joining WELL, she served as Chief Executive Officer for Edaris Health and Senior Research Director with Advisory Board's Information Technology Strategy Council. Previously, she was Vice President and Chief Information Officer for Boston Medical Center for more than a decade.



GUILLAUME DE ZWIREK

Guillaume founded WELL Health in 2015. Before WELL, he worked at Google as a Product Marketing Manager and as the Director of publishing and performance marketing at Graphiq.com (acquired by Amazon). Gui's vision for WELL Health: streamline the complex digital health ecosystem, and all its various communications touchpoints, to produce a better patient experience.



About WELL™ Health

WELL Health is a SaaS digital health leader in patient communications and the [2021 Best in KLAS winner in Patient Outreach](#). The WELL Health intelligent communications hub is the only two-way digital health solution engaging patients throughout their entire care experience. WELL Health enables conversations between patients and their providers through secure, multilingual (19 different languages) messaging in the patient's preferred communications channel: texting, email, telephone, and live chat. WELL Health helps 200,000+ providers facilitate more than 1.1 billion messages for 37 million patients annually. By unifying and automating disjointed communications across healthcare organizations, WELL Health reduces unnecessary provider stress and potential errors, while increasing patient visits and loyalty.

Founded in 2015, WELL Health is based in Santa Barbara, California. WELL Health has been named No. 10 on 2021 [Forbes America's Best Startup Employers](#) list, among the 2020 [Best Places to Work by Modern Healthcare](#) and ranked on the Inc. 5000 list of fastest-growing private companies for two consecutive years.

For more information, visit wellapp.com.

Awards and Recognition

