

# 3 Ways Cloud Communications Connects the Ideal Patient Experience

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# Introduction

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Amid all the debate in recent years about how to manage healthcare in the U.S., an interesting thing happened. Despite the debate, the industry itself began to rally around a simple—but extremely powerful—concept: put the patient at the center of the healthcare model and everyone wins. In other words, by focusing on improved patient outcomes—better scheduling, more coordinated care aimed at shorter hospital stays, and significantly stronger patient engagement post-discharge—not only do patients benefit but so do providers.

The primary catalyst to make this a reality has been the emergence of a new generation of cloud communications solutions that allow patients and providers to connect in more productive ways that can dramatically improve the efficiency of healthcare, as well as the lives of patients. In particular, the

ability to use an integrated suite of communications capabilities, such as voice, messaging, video meetings, and contact center technologies, makes it possible for patients and providers to make meaningful connections in whatever way the patient prefers—across any device, anytime, anywhere. The result is an “ideal patient experience” that goes beyond simply providing the best care but the easiest care, as well.

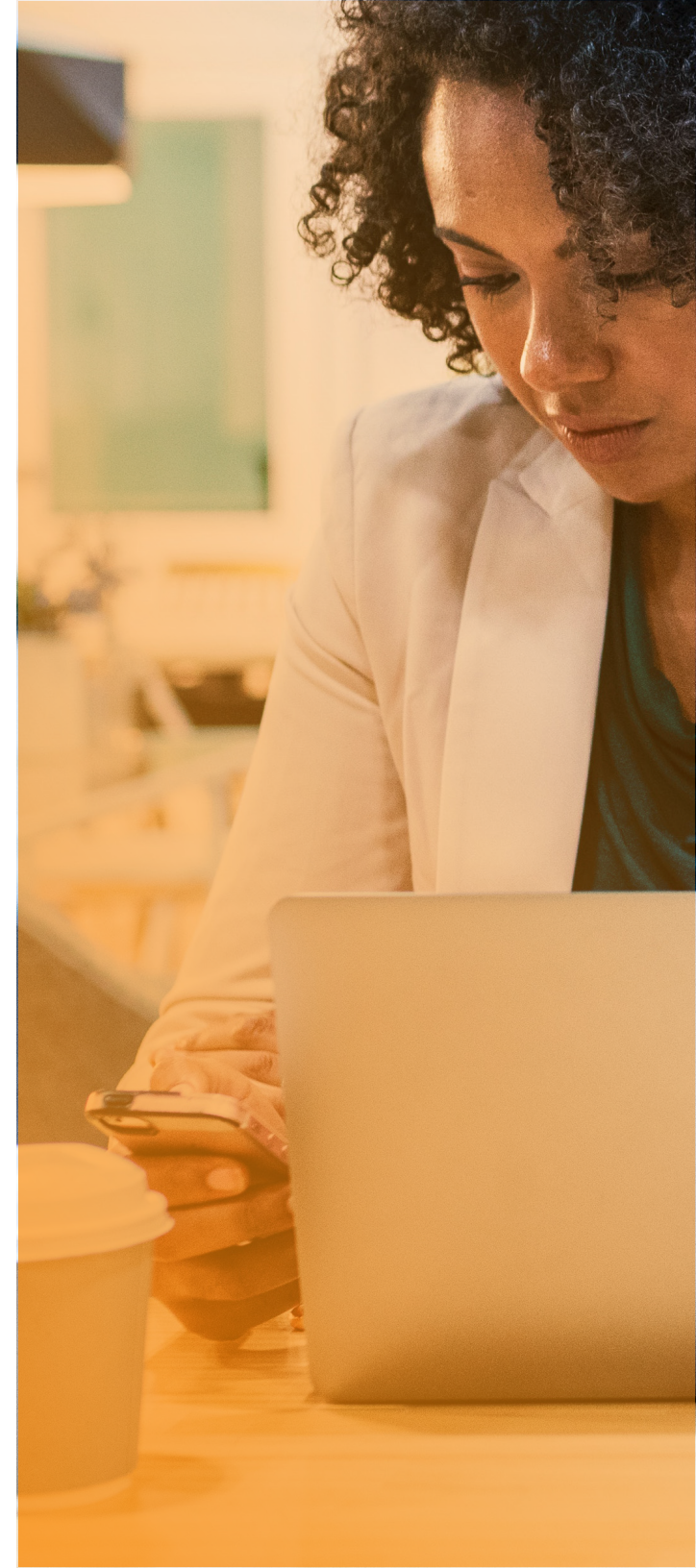
In the following pages, we’ll discuss real-life scenarios where these powerful technologies have reimaged how care is delivered today. In each case, we’ll examine these scenarios from both the patient and provider perspective to show how the ideal patient experience drives better outcomes for each.

# The challenges of scheduling for patients

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The patient experience often starts with scheduling an appointment. Unfortunately, that can be a messy, disorganized, time-consuming, and, ultimately, unsatisfactory ordeal. For starters, whether it's a small practice or a larger healthcare provider, it can sometimes be difficult for patients to reach a live human being to schedule an appointment. In many cases, providers have phone and contact center systems that lack capabilities for cross-device support, call forwarding, and SMS/text messaging. As a result, patients experience long wait times and calls frequently go unanswered. When patients do reach a live person, they frequently experience unnecessary transfers.

In addition, the follow-up experience for an appointment can be nonexistent or spotty, at best, with serious implications for the patient. Without proper follow up from providers, patients more frequently forget their appointments. Patients who miss appointments are less likely to schedule a new one, which can lead to more serious health issues down the road.



# The challenges of scheduling for providers

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The patient experience scenario described above also has serious implications for providers. In some cases, calls go unanswered. Most providers often don't have an easy way to know how many. Also, the fact that phone calls go unanswered is a serious issue for seniors and other vulnerable patients, typically when they call, they need medical care immediately and can't wait days to be seen. Unfortunately, when calls go unanswered, patients often go elsewhere for an appointment. When it happens frequently, the revenue implications can be significant. Perhaps the most serious issue for providers is patient no-shows. [A study by The Journal of the American Osteopathic Association](#) noted that no-show rates in outpatient settings range from 23% to 34%. Often, there are three reasons for no-shows:

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- The patient forgot the appointment
  - The patient had a conflict with their appointment
  - The patient couldn't reach anyone to reschedule
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In addition to no-shows, poor scheduling management by providers leads to reactive and inconsistent allocation of staff. That can lead to staff frustration, which also impacts the patient experience.

# How unified cloud communications creates the ideal patient scheduling experience

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Cloud communications technology offers the potential to address these scheduling issues head-on. It allows providers to put patients at the center of a tightly connected experience, using the technologies they prefer. It also provides capabilities that streamline and automate clinical workflows. Here's how it works:



Effective scheduling management reduces no-shows by 30%.

—American Journal of Medicine, Volume 123, Issue 6

1. A patient has a knee injury and calls a doctor for an appointment.
2. In a small practice, an omnichannel cloud communications solution automatically sends the call to a desk phone, as well as a mobile phone and laptop, via an integrated app in the front office. After three rings, the call is automatically forwarded via an integrated app to a mobile phone in the back office.

For larger providers, patients use contact center IVR technology to select appointment scheduling. Their ID is detected and they're automatically forwarded to the contact center.

3. In the small practice, an assistant answers the mobile call and walks to the front of the office to schedule the appointment.

At the larger provider, the patient's information automatically appears on screen as the call is received. The agent schedules the patient for a same-day visit at the nearest location.

4. For both the small and large practice, the opted-in patient receives an automated SMS 24 hours prior to the appointment confirming the time and address.

# The challenges of care team collaboration for patients

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Nowhere in the healthcare environment is the need for effective communication and information-sharing more critical than in care-team collaboration—before, during, and after treatment. Disconnected healthcare communication workflows and systems can create significant issues for patients. When patients lack information on their care (why they're being referred, for example), they're more prone to stress, which can aggravate or even worsen other health conditions. In addition, poor coordination has the potential to lengthen patient treatment, as well as contribute to the need for additional treatment.

In addition to those critical care issues, [poor care coordination was found to increase medical costs in a 2015 study](#). The average cost of chronic disease management, for example, increased by more than \$4,500 over three years [per patient], according to the research.

Proper care coordination can be complex. It requires timely communication and rapid sharing of information across multiple parties—primary care physicians, specialists, nurses, and more. Any break in the chain can have costly—even tragic—implications.

# The challenges of care team collaboration for providers

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Poor care coordination also has significant implications for providers, as well. Legacy technologies, such as paper, email, phone/voicemail, old PBX on-premises equipment, and disparate meetings and messaging tools, fragment care coordination workflows. This restricts collaboration, hindering the quality of patient care significantly. When communication and information-sharing suffer in the patient care process, providers have limited information to treat patients. That can be costly in more ways than one. Insufficient information can lead to unmet emotional needs for patients during the process, as well as prescribing conflicting medications or incorrect dosages. These can have devastating implications for patients, as well as potential legal implications for providers.

As a workaround, providers can sometimes turn to personal or off-network devices to store or communicate sensitive patient information. This practice is risky, inefficient, and can result in compliance issues and HIPAA violations.

In addition, fragmented care coordination results in higher costs. According to research, healthcare staff commit 19 minutes of every hour on coordinating care. Providers already commit 50 percent of their expenses to staffing. Reductions in both these metrics can have a positive impact on a provider's bottom line.

# How unified cloud communications creates the ideal patient care experience

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Value-based care initiatives that focus on patient outcomes are invigorating care coordination. With cloud communications technology at the core, new models for care coordination can allow providers to engage with patients before an incident occurs, shortening hospital stays or possibly preventing them. Consider the following scenario:

1. A patient who had knee surgery receives care during team rounds.
2. The patient's assigned nurse coordinates all pre-round labs, tests, and vitals.
3. A nurse begins team rounds with a video meeting on a tablet, including screen share.
4. Using the same communications platform, the nurse and an attending physician meet at the patient's bedside, while an offsite orthopedist joins via a mobile app to consult in real time.
5. They determine the patient needs alternative medication, so the physician uses the app to message a pharmacist to confirm order entry and an ETA on delivery.
6. The pharmacist responds that the medication isn't on site, but will be ready for the patient's BID dose later that morning.
7. A multidisciplinary team identifies the next steps for the patient and begins working on discharge planning.





# The challenges of post-discharge engagement for patients

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The equation seems simple enough: when patients get more involved in their own care, they're more likely to adhere to instructions and ultimately experience a better outcome. On the other hand, a lack of patient engagement can result in anxiety, stress, and longer stays in the hospital.

Readmissions are frustrating for patients. Often, they feel they need to go back to their provider for basic questions that could easily be solved if they could speak with someone remotely. After initial treatment, some patients experience transportation issues. Physically getting to the provider is frustrating

and complicated. Ultimately, when patients feel a stronger connection to their providers, and when they feel their providers take a strong interest in their well-being, patients are more likely to follow treatment recommendations and engage in preventative care. In primary care specifically, research has shown that **patients are three times more likely to follow care instructions when they sense high levels of trust with providers.**

# The challenges of post-discharge engagement for providers

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The importance of engaging patients in their own care, particularly post-discharge, is critical for providers for several reasons. Of all workflows, the patient engagement cycle requires the most multi-disciplinary collaboration and planning with patients and their families. A lack of patient engagement can lead to poor patient clinical outcomes, reduced patient satisfaction, and higher readmission rates. Avoidable readmissions are costly, because it's more challenging for providers to receive reimbursements. Each has the potential to impact the financial strength of healthcare providers. That's why treating patients as partners in the process makes so much sense for both sides.

One of the top challenges in patient engagement has always been resources. With staffing accounting for up to half of provider costs, many struggle to add dedicated resources to strengthen patient engagement. For example, manually reaching out to patients post-discharge can be time-consuming and costly. If providers can do it at all, it's likely only for a small portion of patients. It can be challenging even when providers have call center resources.

# How cloud communications creates the ideal patient engagement experience

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Research indicates that patients who remain engaged with their care team are more likely to take medications, follow post-discharge instructions, and attend follow-up appointments. Cloud communications technology is the means by which patients can stay in consistent contact with their providers. Here's an example of how technology can improve patient engagement post-discharge:



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According to Accenture, 54% of patients want to use their smartphones to communicate with healthcare providers.

1. A patient is ready for discharge and receives prescriptions and instructions for physiotherapy appointments.
2. Recovering at home, the patient has a reaction to pain medication.
3. Instead of readmitting, the patient calls the Patient Care Navigator number.
4. The patient's caller ID is detected, which routes the call to a specific outpatient call center agent. The agent checks with a doctor via an integrated text app, and within minutes the doctor has provided a recommendation to take the medication with food.
5. The patient has a question about knee exercises and logs into the patient portal. A live chat is launched with a physiotherapist, who provides immediate answers to the patient.
6. After each interaction, the patient receives an SMS text to log into the portal and complete a Patient Satisfaction Survey.

# How RingCentral helps providers create the ideal patient experience

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RingCentral provides a unified cloud communications and collaboration solution that allows providers to seamlessly collaborate via integrated voice, messaging, meetings, and contact center. RingCentral allows staff to work the way they want, giving providers the ability to engage with patients on the channels they prefer. Both patients and providers can connect anywhere, anytime, on any device to streamline and automate workflows, lower costs, and dramatically improve patient satisfaction and engagement.

With RingCentral's extensions, as well as our collaborative contact center technology, patients can always reach a live person. RingCentral Contact Center offers an integrated omnichannel solution that ensures patients receive the attention they deserve, and empowers agents to connect with experts in the organization to provide the answers patients seek quickly and efficiently.

Built on a secure, flexible, and open platform, RingCentral solutions are HiTrust CSF certified for use in HIPAA-compliant environments. In addition, RingCentral integrates with your most important mission-critical apps, with full APIs for customized integrations, as well. With RingCentral, providers and patients can work as one to connect the ideal patient experience.

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RingCentral, Inc. (NYSE: RNG) is a leading provider of global enterprise cloud communications, collaboration, and contact center solutions. More flexible and cost-effective than legacy on-premise systems, the RingCentral platform empowers employees to Work as One™ from any location, on any device, and via any mode to better serve customers, improving business efficiency and customer satisfaction. The company provides unified voice, video meetings, team messaging, digital customer engagement, and integrated contact center solutions for enterprises globally. RingCentral's open platform integrates with leading business apps and enables customers to easily customize business workflows. RingCentral is headquartered in Belmont, California, and has offices around the world.