

2024 healthcare communication trends report

AI technology supports healthcare communication, but concerns over privacy and security linger



Patient visit summary

Dr. Garcia discussed the patient's mild hypertension and prescribed two me...

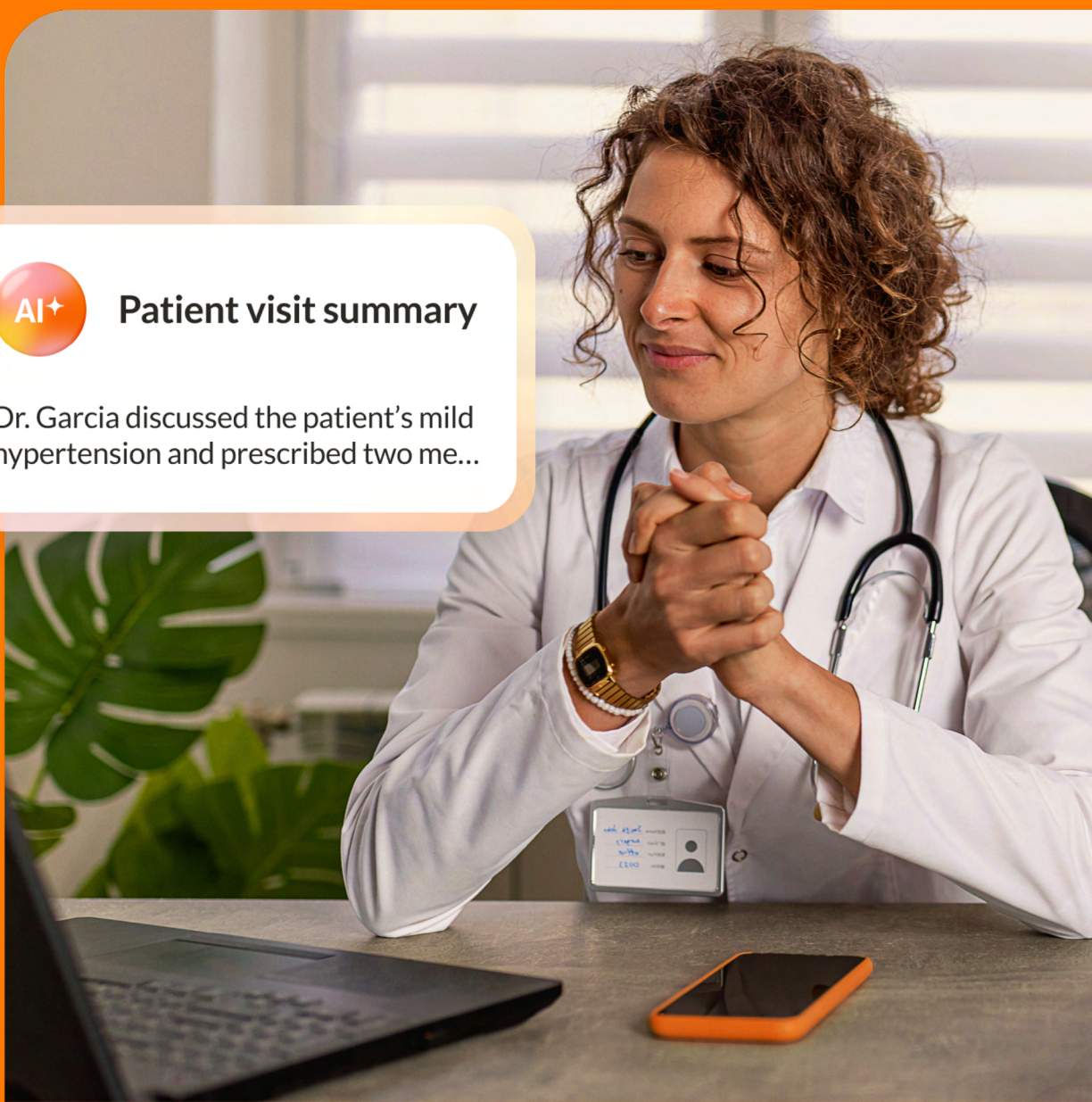


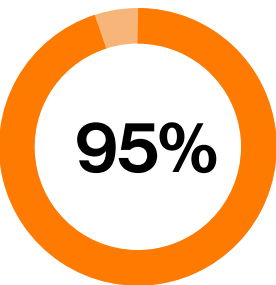
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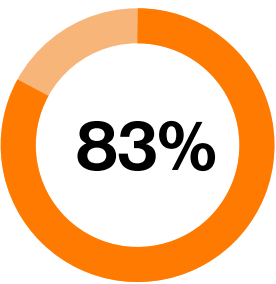
Overview

Patient interactions with healthcare providers begin long before an appointment—and extend well after. From text messaging and social media to chatbots and virtual assistants, new technologies have raised patient expectations for interactions with their healthcare providers.

Provider insights on patient communication and technology use



Of providers agree that effective patient communication correlates with higher patient satisfaction

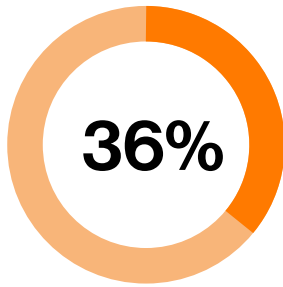


Of healthcare practices actively use a contact center platform

The healthcare industry is undergoing a profound digital transformation with communication at its core, and as patients take on more increasingly active roles in managing their healthcare journeys, it's more important than ever for practices to communicate effectively across platforms.

Manual and disconnected methods for patient engagement are no longer sustainable. Long wait times and difficulty connecting with healthcare providers are becoming increasingly frustrating for patients. Providers are facing resource constraints and labor shortages that leave them short-staffed, forcing staff to take on communication roles for which they aren't prepared and complicating communication even further. The good news is the communications industry has already undergone rapid transformation in cloud delivered solutions and can offer this environment innovative new solutions. Healthcare practices can now invest in modern communication technologies to enhance patient experiences and operational efficiency.

Recognizing the critical role of effective communication in patient satisfaction, RingCentral, a leader in unified communication and customer experience technology, surveyed 201 patients and 300 providers about their experiences with communications in the healthcare sphere. Among patients, the study explored expectations for interactions with providers. Among providers, the study probed how providers are leveraging



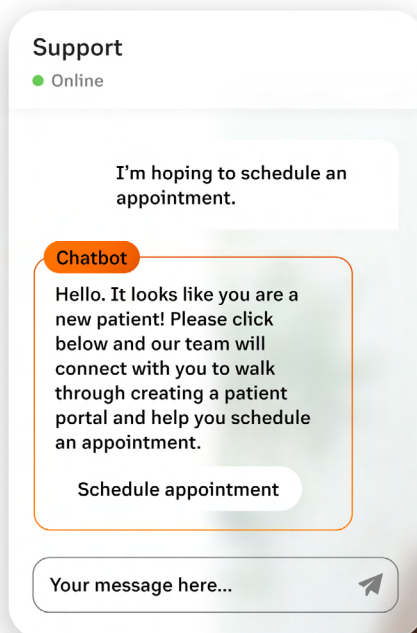
Of practices are not fully satisfied with their technology for patient communications

AI-powered solutions to enhance customer experiences. The findings provide an exclusive view into customer healthcare experiences in the U.S., painting a picture of patient behaviors that can help guide change and innovation for practices during a time of intense technological transformation.

The survey reveals that 95% of providers agree there is a link between effective patient communication and higher patient satisfaction. The vast majority (83%) of healthcare practices say they actively use a contact center platform, and yet 36% of practices are not fully satisfied with their technology for patient communications.

The following report describes patient preferences for healthcare communication and provider challenges in meeting these expectations. It also discusses innovative solutions that prioritize both sets of needs.

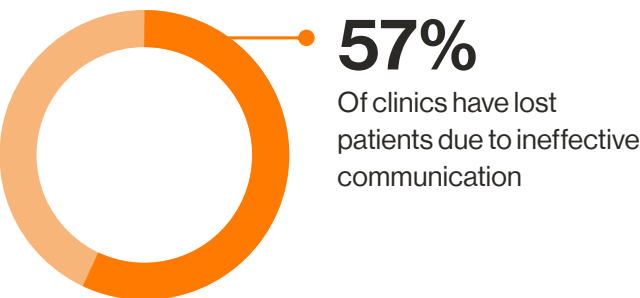
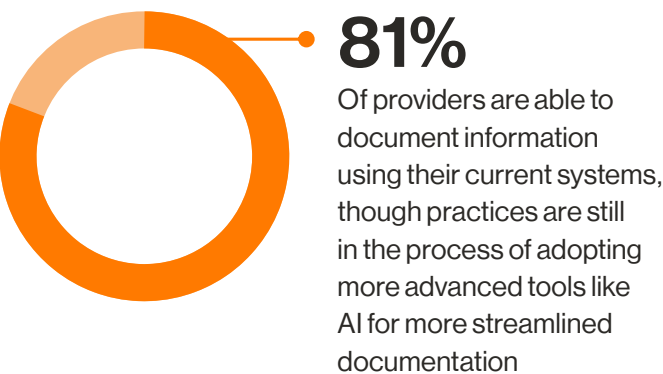
By exploring the role of AI in streamlining communication and identifying concerns about AI integration, this data highlights opportunities for provider organizations to integrate tools and strategies that create stronger patient experiences.



Top communication challenges for providers

Effective healthcare communication has the potential to significantly impact health outcomes, patient satisfaction, and healthcare costs.

Providers struggle with ineffective communication and documentation



The benefits can be clear, particularly with contact centers like RingCentral's RingCX, which combine voice, video, and digital channels with the latest AI technology to support customers and contact center employees before, during, and after interactions.

Yet some providers lag in adopting new digital platforms and tools because the transition can be difficult, particularly for providers grappling with legacy systems and limited resources. And even when providers do embrace technological solutions, they don't always meet their needs as expected.

The survey shows that a third of practices are not fully satisfied with their current technology for patient communications, with nearly one in five (19%) saying they are unable to document information from inbound calls. This can result in patients falling through the cracks or not feeling seen and remembered, which can quickly deteriorate patient trust in a vulnerable setting.

More than half (57%) of providers say patients have left their practice due to ineffective communication. In addition to the financial impact of attrition, this level of churn also affects continuity of care and provider reputation.

While most clinic staff say they believe AI-assisted technology could help, close to half (46%) say they don't have a confident understanding of how these tools could help them communicate with patients. When asked about the top challenges to adopting AI for patient communication, 48% report training staff as a key challenge, and 40% say they struggle with integrating AI systems into existing healthcare infrastructure.

The most commonly cited challenge, however, is ensuring data privacy and security compliance, reflecting a larger concern about the security of personal information and highlighting the importance of selecting trusted technology partners.



Top challenges for providers adopting AI for patient communications*

Ensuring data privacy and security compliance



Training staff and patients on new technologies



Overcoming resistance to change among staff and patients



Integrating new systems with existing healthcare IT infrastructure



Managing costs and proving ROI of new technology solutions



Keeping up with rapid technological advancements



Ensuring accessibility and usability for all patients



Balancing human touch with automation and AI



*Respondents could select more than one answer

Patient preferences and expectations

In today’s interconnected world, people are accustomed to using multiple communication methods for personal and professional purposes. As consumers become increasingly digitally savvy and accustomed to seamless, omnichannel experiences, they expect the same level of convenience from their healthcare providers.

How patients prefer to make appointments*

Phone



Online patient portal



App



Email



Text



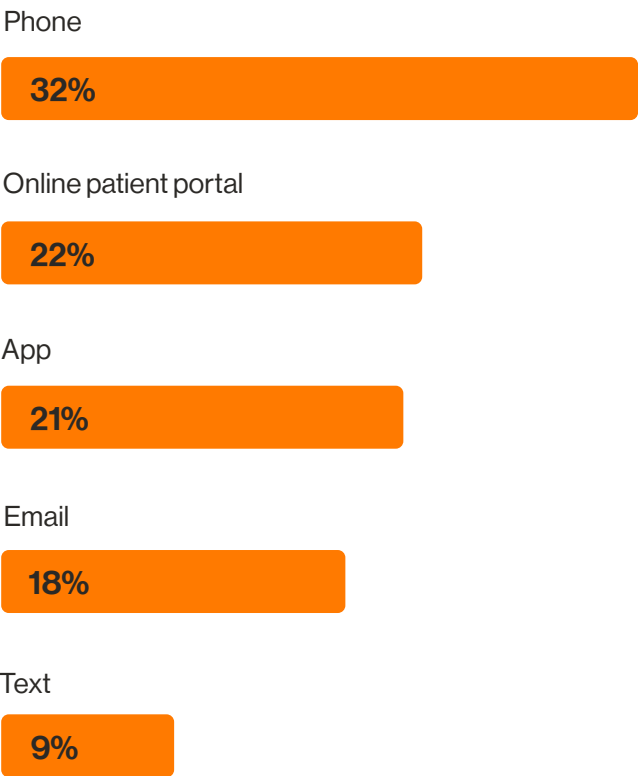
An overwhelming majority of patients (84%) prefer clinics that use multiple communication methods. While phone calls are still the most commonly preferred method for making appointments, significant minorities want to use online patient portals (34%) or apps (26%). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the data show that the older a patient is, the more likely they prefer scheduling by phone. A quarter of patients (24%) prefer email for these interactions.

When it comes to receiving communications generally, only a third (32%) of patients selected phone as their preferred communication channel. A majority of patients in all age groups instead prefer a digital channel such as email, text, an online patient portal, or an app. These preferences can be strong—16% of patients said if forced to choose between speaking to someone on the phone or choosing another clinic that doesn’t require phone communication, they would switch clinics. Patients in middle age groups were especially likely to reflect this opinion. However, it is important to note that provider portals alone are not sufficient. Offices must offer a range of connected options to accommodate the majority of patients who do not use these portals.

By far the top patient frustration with visiting a healthcare provider is long wait times, whether in person (61%) or on the phone (33%). The next four top frustrations also reflect patients' desire to have their time respected, including frustrations with staff that seem stretched, insufficient time with providers, difficulty scheduling, and feeling rushed. The data also points to a need for more communications in general, regarding everything from billing to follow-up care instructions.

*Respondents could select more than one answer

How patients prefer to receive communications*



Top patient frustrations when visiting healthcare providers*

61%

Long wait times in person

33%

Long wait times on the phone

27%

Staff that seems stretched and distracted

26%

Insufficient time spent with healthcare providers

26%

Difficulty in scheduling or rescheduling appointments

23%

Feeling rushed during appointments

19%

Lack of clarity in the after-visit summary or instructions

17%

Inadequate responses to questions or concerns

17%

Lack of knowledgeable staff members

16%

Unclear billing and insurance information

13%

Siloed communication with staff members and conflicting priorities

9%

Perceived lack of privacy or confidentiality

*Respondents could select more than one answer



How AI helps improve healthcare communication

AI plays a crucial role in improving healthcare communication by offering innovative solutions that streamline processes, enhance personalization, and foster efficiency. For example, AI can generate call and visit transcripts that document patient-provider interactions, post-visit summaries that help patients understand and adhere to treatment, and personalized reminders for appointments and medications.

Improved outcomes with AI communication tools

57%

Of practices say they saw a decrease in missed appointments after implementing AI communication tools

78%

Of practices report AI analytics has significantly improved their ability to act on patient feedback

78%

Of practices say their patient satisfaction scores increased after implementing AI communication tools

Due to staff or resource constraints, a large majority (75%) of practices express a desire to automate patient communication—and 64% of practices have already implemented some form of AI tool to facilitate communication with patients. AI offers a number of benefits, from providing immediate responses around the clock to freeing up staff time to focus on more complex patient needs.

Providers also reported a range of improvements after implementing AI communication tools, including fewer missed appointments, better ability to act on patient feedback, and higher patient satisfaction scores.

The survey also asked patients about the use of AI to listen in on appointments and automatically transcribe interactions. While this type of AI listening can save time, reduce error, and allow providers to be more present and patient-centered, some patients expressed concerns about this use of technology. In particular, about half of patients said they worry about privacy and data security, though far fewer are concerned about data mismanagement. A third (31%) say they worry about accuracy, while about one in five (20%) worries about consent.

Top patient concerns about AI software*

54%

Privacy

46%

Data security

31%

Inaccurate summary
and transcriptions

27%

Depersonalization

22%

Accountability

21%

Transparency

20%

Consent

18%

Job displacement of
healthcare workers

18%

Data mismanagement

16%

Bias



Can we follow-up next week?

NEXT STEP SUGGESTION

Send invite for a follow-up
appointment with John next week

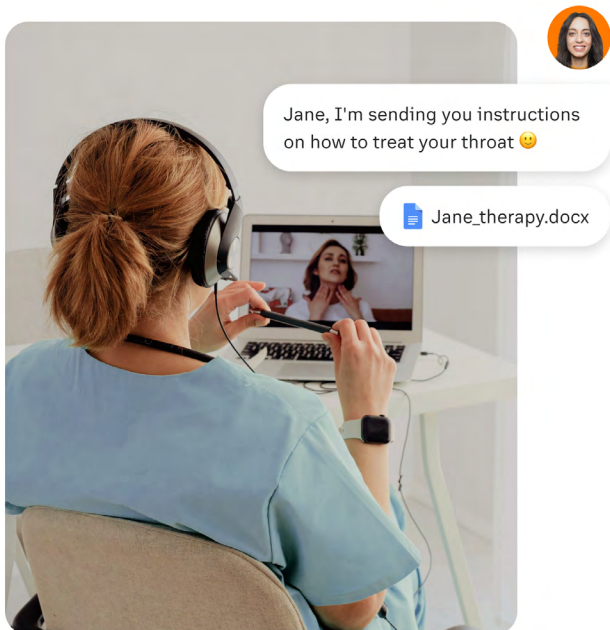
Send email



*Respondents could select more than one answer

How providers think about omnichannel communication

Unlike traditional communication methods that typically operate in silos, omnichannel communication seamlessly integrates various channels such as phone calls, emails, text messages, online patient portals, mobile apps, and social media platforms. This approach allows healthcare providers to deliver consistent and personalized experiences to patients regardless of the channel they choose to interact with.



Providers are considering how best to leverage omnichannel opportunities to enhance patient engagement and satisfaction. The most common goal, cited by 54% of providers, is to make it easier to cancel and reschedule appointments online. Half of providers (52%) also want the option to send appointment reminders and confirmations through multiple channels, and a similar proportion (49%) want to implement a simple online check-in process.

Top ways clinics want to improve patient communication before a visit*

Making it easy to reschedule or cancel appointments online



Sending appointment confirmations and reminders through multiple channels



Offering a clear and simple online check-in process



Providing detailed pre-visit instructions and what to expect



Ensuring patient questions can be answered quickly and efficiently through a preferred channel



Offering detailed facility information (parking, site map, etc.)



Allowing patients to pre-submit questions or concerns before their appointment



*Respondents could select more than one answer

Opportunities to improve patient satisfaction and retention

Patient satisfaction and retention are two crucial metrics that directly impact the success and sustainability of a practice, as well as improved health outcomes and reduced healthcare costs. High turnover rates can also impact patient satisfaction scores and strain clinic resources.

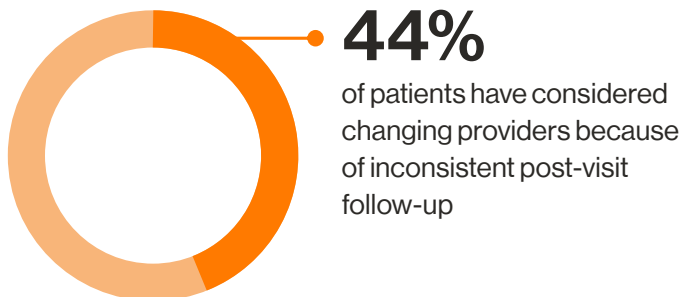
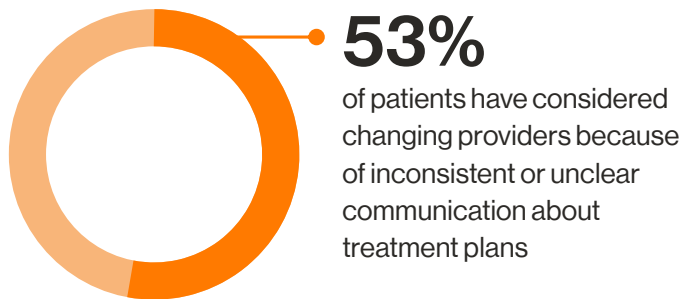
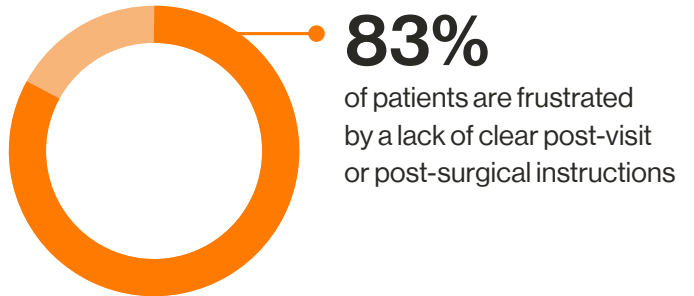


Poor communication was the most frequently cited reason (32%) for switching healthcare providers among patients in the RingCentral survey. A significant percentage (28%) also named long wait times as a reason for changing providers. Privacy, however, was not a big reason for churn—only 7% said they had changed providers due to privacy concerns—indicating that while patients may think about privacy when it comes to AI, it's not a major factor in where they seek care.

When it comes to poor communication, the data offers additional insight into what providers can do differently, especially when it comes to post-visit communication. An overwhelming majority of patients (83%) say they are frustrated by a lack of clear post-visit instructions, and 53% say they have considered changing providers due to unclear communication about treatment plans. The proportion is even higher among patients under the age of 45, with about two-thirds saying they have thought about switching.

On the other hand, 86% of patients say they feel less anxious when their provider communicates consistently and compassionately about their progress, and 91% say they have felt more at peace when healthcare staff provided clear, empathetic explanations of procedures and treatments.

Patient dissatisfaction due to communication gaps



Top reasons patients change healthcare providers*

Poor communication

32%

Moving location

29%

Long wait times

28%

Inadequate care

24%

Lack of trust

21%

Insurance issues

21%

Scheduling difficulties

20%

Personality clash

15%

Other

14%

Office environment

11%

Privacy concerns

7%

*Respondents could select more than one answer

5 key takeaways for successful healthcare communications

The survey data highlights multiple specific opportunities to evolve healthcare communications for a new world.

These five steps can put your organization on a path to better customer relationships, smoother internal operations, and cutting-edge technology.

- 1. Upgrade communication technology.** A majority of practices (57%) say they have lost clients due to ineffective communication. Enhance patient satisfaction and reduce attrition by adopting AI-powered contact center platforms and overcoming legacy system challenges.
- 2. Train and integrate AI.** Nearly eight in 10 practices (78%) say AI analytics significantly improved their patient satisfaction scores and ability to act on patient feedback. Train staff on AI tools and ensure smooth integration to automate tasks and personalize interactions.
- 3. Use multiple communication methods.** Patients overwhelmingly (84%) prefer clinics that use multiple communication methods. Meet patient preferences by offering various communication channels and addressing long wait times and scheduling issues.
- 4. Ensure clear communication.** More than half of patients (53%) have considered switching providers because of inconsistent or unclear communication about their treatment. Maintain patient trust and satisfaction with clear, empathetic communication and easy rescheduling options.
- 5. Address AI concerns.** Patients value the features AI can provide, but some say they worry particularly about privacy and security. Provide clear information and strong data security to alleviate patient concerns about AI, while using it for accurate documentation and follow-up summaries.

Recommendations to leverage AI technology for enhanced patient care

Contact center solutions like RingCentral's RingCX, which combine voice, video, and digital channels, are the foundation of an effective healthcare communications strategy. As part of these solutions, AI holds immense potential to revolutionize patient communication by offering accessible, personalized, and efficient patient experiences. The survey results highlight several opportunities for AI to address patient needs and preferences, and they also point to strategies for addressing patient concerns related to AI security and privacy.

Improving patient communication with AI

In addition to contact center features like omnichannel and intelligent routing, AI technologies are already transforming patient satisfaction and, ultimately, health outcomes. However, it is important to note that AI does not solve every problem and should be used as a complementary tool alongside other healthcare strategies. The following examples are just three ways practices can easily integrate AI for improved patient care.

- 1. AI-generated transcripts.** AI-generated transcripts can help ensure accurate and comprehensive documentation of patient-provider interactions. These transcripts capture key details of conversations, including symptoms, treatment plans, and follow-up instructions, promoting better continuity of care and reducing the risk of errors or omissions in medical records. They save valuable time and resources through automation, which allows providers to focus more on patient care.



- 2. Post-visit summaries.** Providing patients with post-visit summaries generated by AI can improve their understanding of their health status and treatment plans. These summaries condense information into easily digestible formats that highlight key takeaways, medication instructions, and follow-up recommendations. This condensed information equips patients to better comply with treatment, make informed health decisions, and engage more actively in their care. Post-visit summaries are also valuable communication tools between patients and their caregivers.
- 3. Personalized reminders.** AI-driven personalized reminders play a crucial role in patient adherence to treatment plans. Based on patient data and preferences, automation provides tailored reminders for medication refills, follow-up appointments, preventive screenings, and lifestyle changes. These reminders can be delivered through text, email, or mobile apps depending on patient preferences. In addition to improving health outcomes and reducing healthcare costs, personalized reminders demonstrate a clinic's commitment to patient-centered care and foster stronger patient-provider relationships.

Addressing patient concerns about AI

As highlighted in the survey results, some patients have concerns about AI security and privacy in a health clinic setting. Here are some strategies for taking a proactive approach to build trust and transparency.

- 1. Clear communication.** Provide patients with clear information about how AI technologies are used within the clinic and the measures in place to protect their privacy and data security. This can be achieved through brochures, website FAQs, or in-person discussions during appointments.
- 2. Consent and opt-in/opt-out mechanisms.** Allow patients to understand and choose whether they want their data to be used for information-gathering purposes. Offer opt-in/opt-out options for specific AI-driven services or features, giving patients control over their data usage.
- 3. Data encryption and anonymization.** Ensure that all patient data collected and processed by AI systems is encrypted to prevent unauthorized access. Additionally, anonymize data whenever possible to minimize the risk of patient identification.

4. **Compliance with regulations.** Adhere strictly to healthcare data privacy regulations such as HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) in the United States or GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) in the European Union. Conduct regular audits to ensure compliance and address any potential vulnerabilities promptly.
5. **Secure infrastructure and partnerships.** Invest in secure IT infrastructure and partner with reputable vendors and service providers that prioritize data security and privacy. Conduct thorough assessments of third-party AI solution providers to ensure they adhere to industry standards and best practices.



Elevate patient experiences through seamless communication

Quality communication plays a pivotal role in patient satisfaction and experience from the moment of first contact through after-visit care. As patients increasingly demand personalized, omnichannel, and self-service communication experiences from their providers, those providers have a transformative opportunity to adopt innovative solutions to enhance patient outcomes and satisfaction.

A one-stop contact center solution can help unlock these opportunities, leveraging AI to help offload redundant tasks and save operational costs and time. By reallocating time and energy back to improving service offerings and collaborating efficiently with office staff, providers can realize the promise of technology to improve patient experience, retention, and positive health outcomes.

About RingCentral

RingCentral's RingCX for Healthcare is designed to help you improve patient experience and operational efficiency through a comprehensive, AI-powered contact center solution. RingCX for Healthcare is also a reliable partner, able to provide rich insights from generative AI technology that improve operational efficiencies, improve patient acquisition and retention efforts, and securely manage patient information and data.

For more information, please contact a sales representative. Visit ringcentral.com or call 855-774-2510.

RingCentral

RingCentral Inc. (NYSE: RNG) is a leading provider of AI-driven cloud business communications, contact center, video and hybrid event solutions. RingCentral empowers businesses with conversation intelligence, and unlocks rich customer and employee interactions to provide insights and improved business outcomes. With decades of expertise in reliable and secure cloud communications, RingCentral has earned the trust of millions of customers and thousands of partners worldwide. RingCentral is headquartered in Belmont, California, and has offices around the world.

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