

**SymphonyRM became Actium Health a few years ago and did not carry over my published work to the new site, hence the final draft version below.*

Supporting Providers During COVID-19

The pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for healthcare providers, both professionally and personally. To support them in these difficult circumstances, medical administration and provider liaisons need to adjust their relationship management and communication strategies.

What providers are up against

Professional challenges

Fluctuating patient volume

Providers are undoubtedly experiencing a change in their patient census, and delicately managing communications within a new “normal” that changes daily is no small order.

Whether it’s an influx of patients, requests, or a complete shut-down of offices, it’s straining all access points in the health system, including offices, call centers, operations, and providers themselves.

Keeping up with current patients

Sick patients still need to be seen, but it’s estimated that 77% of primary care physician time is actually spent on high-revenue preventative services.

Fewer preventive appointments can mean major financial losses for providers, and telehealth expansion is still not far enough along to offset the losses in many states and healthcare systems.

Pre-existing burnout

According to a 2018 study, over half of doctors experience burnout — more than double the rate for other professions. As providers grapple with personal protective equipment (PPE) shortages, overcrowded hospitals, providing care outside of their specialty, and long hours, feelings of burnout will only increase.

Personal challenges

Disruptions to living situations

Providers are at increased risk of contracting COVID-19, and many are being extremely cautious about protecting their loved ones from exposure. There are reports of providers going so far as self-isolating in garages, basements, and trailers to help mitigate risk.

Ongoing separation from their families can have negative mental health consequences for providers in an already stressful work situation.

Child and elder care

Providers with children and elderly dependents may be struggling to balance their profession with their caretaking duties. Increased hours mean an increased need for child and elder care, and not all providers have other support systems who can fill in the gaps.

Self-care

Increased stress, working hours, disease exposure, and separation from loved ones will undoubtedly take a toll on providers, especially those on the front lines. Many are struggling with making time for meals, sleep, and downtime to recharge.

How management and outreach teams can help

Although liaisons can't be in the field right now, they can still build relationships and offer meaningful support from a safe social distance. During this transition, your

providers may be more interested in hearing from you regarding how your health system is providing support, resources, and information.

We usually recommend a three-step process for any provider meeting:

1. Pre-visit planning
2. Action and insight
3. Post-visit documentation

To account for the current situation and limitations around in-person meetings, we provide a revised approach below.

Pre-communication planning

It's still important to plan and be up to date. Check your CRM to assess patient volume, phone call volume, and other data that will give you an idea of stressors the provider may be facing. Know your health system's protocols, news, and support functions as well.

Action and insight

Be proactive but tactful about the insights you share with providers. You can use data, but consider revising your talk to cover the following:

- Support functions provided by your health system
- If the provider offers telemedicine, provide information on how you'll support it
- PPE options
- Gather and record information:
 - In the event volunteers are requested, are they willing to volunteer?
 - Do they have needs at home? Child or elder care challenges?
 - Do they need food or basic supplies delivered at home if they are working long hours?

With the last point, it is important to gather this information with sensitivity and empathy. To avoid asking questions that are invasive or inappropriate, instead offer your providers an overview of the assistance and support available to them. Then, give them the opportunity to opt-in to a questionnaire or other avenue to request outreach and assistance.

Post-communication documentation

Make sure you take notes after every interaction, ideally as soon as it ends so the details are fresh in your mind. By tracking key issues and conversations, you can provide invaluable data back to your executives that may be immediately actionable — especially if you are seeing trends across multiple conversations.

Follow up is especially important, particularly for time-sensitive issues surrounding caretaking, transportation, or tech support. You are advocating for your providers and taking an active role in helping them care for their patients, so it's critical they can rely on you.

For those who use SymphonyRM's Provider Relationship Management Platform, we've added COVID-19 specific features to simplify provider outreach and assistance. Each provider profile now includes a drop-down menu where liaisons can easily track which providers need assistance with meals, child care, transportation, and remote work tech support. You can add detailed notes and dates as needed, too.

[IMAGE: PRM SCREENSHOT OF DROPDOWN OPTIONS]

Our reporting dashboards show provider priorities across the market to help leadership make the best decisions for their needs. By filtering according to specific needs, you can help administrators with strategic decisions or directing the right resources to the right individuals.

[IMAGE: INSIGHT SCREENSHOT OF REPORTING OPTIONS]

Changing healthcare circumstances require changing support tactics for liaisons. By keeping in mind the professional and personal challenges providers face under COVID-19, liaisons can strengthen their relationships by supporting them when they need it most.

To learn more about how SymphonyRM's Provider Needs Tracking Tool can help your organization, watch the video below, or [contact us](#).

[Video Overview of Provider Needs Tracking Tool](#)

[EMBEDDED VIDEO: PROVIDER NEEDS TRACKING TOOL]