ROADMAP TO RECOVERY

Guide to Using Automated Outreach to Drive Patient Volume, Create Revenue, and Ensure Continuity of Care

CipherHealth
The Patient Engagement Company

> The fight against this virus has created the **greatest financial crisis in history** for hospitals and health systems."
>
> — Rick Pollack
> President and CEO
> American Hospital Association (AHA)

IN THIS GUIDE...

We will discuss four ways of using patient outreach to help engage more patients and bring back revenue as your facilities reopen for non-emergent care:

1. Increase Patient Awareness and Education
2. Reschedule Deferred Appointments and Close Care Gaps
3. Effectively Manage Chronic Conditions
4. Maximize Your Telehealth Reimbursement

Introduction

As new surges in COVID-19 continue to grip the country, hospitals are once again ramping up operations to care for these patients. At the same time, they are recognizing that office visits, outpatient tests, and elective procedures, which had been cancelled or deferred during peak stages of the pandemic, can no longer be put off.

Lisa Lacasse, president of the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, believes that "the health effects of this pandemic stretch well beyond those diagnosed and suffering from COVID-19 and that **cancer patients are dealing with...unsustainable delays in their care. This data shows the need for quick action in bolstering our health care system so we can both care for those diagnosed with the virus and for those facing a cancer diagnosis."**[1]

In addition to the health crisis stemming from non-emergent visits being delayed, there is also a financial crisis nearly every provider is facing, since elective procedures **account for more than half of hospital revenues.**[2]

Overall, hospitals and health systems are estimated to lose $323.1 billion this year because of revenue losses resulting from cancelled services, including non-elective surgeries and outpatient treatment, as well as reduced emergency department services.[3] Further, hundreds of hospitals have been forced to close or reduce their workforce as a result of these revenue losses, and the worst could be yet to come in terms of the financial devastation.[4] To recover this lost volume, the average hospital needs to run at **110% of their pre-COVID-19 capacity for six months.**[5]

Ultimately, adapting to the rapidly changing healthcare delivery system and understanding patient needs during this trying time can mean **the difference between organizations that will continue serving their communities for decades to come and those that will be forced to close.**

As the loss in patient volume is creating outsized effects on both health outcomes and financial sustainability for providers, it becomes essential to identify strategies to **ensure patients schedule and complete delayed visits, testing, procedures, and surgeries, and that they feel comfortable returning for emergent visits.** At the same time, hospitals must rely on the knowledge gained in treating COVID-19 patients during the early months of the pandemic in order to simultaneously provide quality care to both cohorts.

1 Increase Patient Awareness and Education

Hospitals and health systems need to inform patients that they are ready for business and create awareness of avenues for care. But just because your facility is open again for office visits, testing, and elective procedures, it doesn't mean that patients are ready to return.

Patients might not fully understand where, why, and how they should seek care, or even that they are due for a visit. Patients also may not fully understand the risk of delayed care, or realize that it's incumbent on them to book or rebook missed appointments. And even if they are aware, they may be afraid to book an appointment for fear of being exposed to COVID-19, which is still seeing rising rates of infection in many states.

The COVID-19 virus has required hospitals to redefine the patient experience in terms of safety, leading to greater patient trust.

YOUR ROADMAP TO RECOVERY

To engage patients during crisis periods, health systems should establish an external communication plan to educate patients and alleviate safety concerns across their network. Explain the importance of care in preventing poor outcomes, as well as the safety precautions you are taking to keep them safe. Consistency and up-to-date information are key to a concerted approach that leverages several different channels of communication.

Increase Patient Awareness and Education:

- **Send automated texts and pre-recorded calls** to your entire population to let them know you are open for all non-emergent procedures (including office visits, screenings, and inpatient and outpatient visits) that may have been put off due to COVID-19.
- **Update your homepage, leverage social media channels,** and include relevant information in any patient newsletters you regularly send out to ensure consistent messaging.
- **Alleviate patient fears** by explaining how your hospital adheres to all required safety measures and then some, such as:
  - **Screening patients, staff, and visitors prior to entering** facilities to ensure they do not exhibit any signs or symptoms of COVID-19.
  - **Implementing "virtual waiting rooms"** to complete check-in processes remotely and reduce unnecessary contact in offices and waiting areas to mitigate viral spread.
  - **Maintaining an adequate supply of PPE** for use by staff at the facility, who are taking all necessary precautions when engaging with patients.
  - **Spacing out appointments** to comply with social distancing measures.
  - **Implementing social distancing protocols** throughout your facility, such as using markers to indicate "six feet apart" in walkways and elevators.
  - **Enforcing visitor restrictions.**

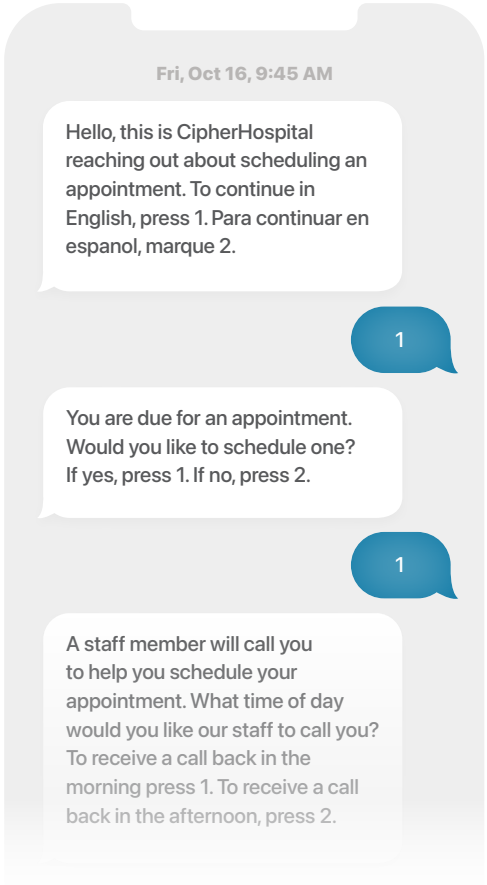
> A post-COVID-19 environment and 'new normal' will require us to be **innovative and flexible as we reimagine many of our processes and protocols**... Arming patients with a choice, when appropriate, enables them to make decisions they feel most comfortable [with]."
>
> — **Sven Gierlinger**
> **Chief Experience Officer**
> **Northwell Health**

2 Reschedule Deferred Appointments and Close Care Gaps

As a result of the pandemic, many hospitals put preventive care on the back burner, resulting in gaps in care as patients became overdue for screenings or other clinical services. Similarly, providers cancelled many non-emergent procedures and now have a backlog to prioritize for rescheduling.

It is virtually impossible for the front office staff to reach the volume of patients resulting from these delays or foregone procedures. **With the pandemic still raging in some areas, staff members are already being utilized for critical processes for existing and incoming COVID-19 patients.**

> Now is the time to boldly transform our healthcare systems in ways we have previously been unable to. **We should use this unprecedented opportunity to fix what hasn't worked** and direct our full attention to new and greater goals centered on creating value for patients."
>
> — Jaewon Ryu, MD
> Karen Murphy, RN
> Jonathan R. Slotkin, MD
> Geisinger Health System



YOUR ROADMAP TO RECOVERY

Implementing automated patient communication tools to reach out en masse will allocate valuable staffing resources toward attending to the influx of new care appointments, deferred procedures, and any new COVID-19 population that may be emerging in your hospital.

Reschedule Deferred Appointments and Close Care Gaps:

- **Reach more patients in less time by using automated outreach** tools to call or text patients based on their needs.

  For example:

  - **For patients who are overdue for wellness visits or follow-up appointments**, emphasize the importance of preventive care in your communications.
  - **For patients who have had a procedure cancelled due to the COVID-19 crisis**, emphasize that you're sorry their care had to be put off, acknowledge that their care is important to you, and reinforce the safety policies you have initiated to lessen their fears about virus exposure.
- **In addition to contacting patients via live transfer or alerting features**, triage patients to the proper staff member to answer questions or help with scheduling.
- **Automated outreach may also be conducted in different languages** to improve reach rates among multicultural populations.
- **Appointment reminders can also be automated** to help ensure patients show up for their visits once they are scheduled and reinforce safety policies pre-arrival.

CASE STUDY

Hospital Increases Appointment Volume with Automated Outreach

Whether reaching out to patients during a once-in-a-lifetime public health crisis or in the "new normal," our experience with customers has shown that scheduling and reminding patients of their appointments leads to increased volume. Here is how one of our customers has used automated outreach to re-engage patients prior to and during the COVID-19 crisis.

Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital (ZSFG) is a safety-net hospital affiliated with the University of California San Francisco (UCSF Health). They turned to CipherHealth to use automated patient outreach to increase show rates for gastrointestinal procedures. They wanted to engage more patients via calls and texts, and reach out to them in their preferred language. In addition, they wanted to gather data to help inform future improvements, such as show rates by patient response, gender, language, and age.

THE PROGRAM

All patients scheduled for outpatient endoscopic procedures received automated reminders as a text message or voice call in English, with an option to choose to switch to Spanish or Chinese. Seven days before their appointment, patients were asked to confirm, or offered the opportunity to reschedule. The day before the procedure, patients received a communication reminding them to follow specific dietary instructions and other guidelines in order to prepare.

THE RESULTS

An analysis of the program between December 12, 2019 and March 13, 2020* reveals that **58% of patients responded to outreach, with 86% confirming their appointment and 14% requesting rescheduling.** Rescheduling is a positive outcome because it allows the hospital to backfill the original appointments.

Confirmed appointments were associated with increased show rates compared to patients who did not confirm (75% vs. 49%). In other words, the number of patients who showed up for their appointment when they received an automated reminder was more than 25 percentage points higher than those who didn't.

*ZSFG had to defer these appointments in March, 2020 as a result of a California ban on nonemergency surgeries and procedures, including services like colonoscopies and endoscopies. They have resumed these procedures, as well as their Appointment Reminder outreach program with CipherHealth as of August, 2020.

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3 Effectively Manage Chronic Conditions

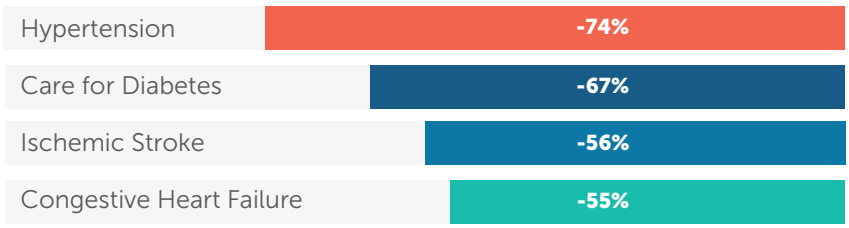
It's important to continually monitor patients with chronic conditions — such as congestive heart failure, kidney disease, and diabetes — during the pandemic since these **conditions are likely to worsen if care is deferred, resulting in much more costly and extensive treatment later on.**

An additional challenge is that these patients may be at higher risk of complications from COVID-19, contributing to their fear of leaving home for help when needed.[6]

The "National Patient and Procedure Volume Report" by Strata Decision Technology found a **54.5% decrease in unique patients seeking care** in a hospital setting during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to **a loss of $1.3 billion in revenue versus the previous year.**[7]

Across specific service lines, as compared with the same time period in 2019, the National Patient and Procedure Volume Report found that access to clinical care for patients with life-threatening conditions declined significantly, including congestive heart failure (-55%) and stroke (-56%). Access to care for chronic conditions also fell for patients with hypertension (-74%) and diabetes (-67%).[8]

Impact to Inpatient and Outpatient Encounters



Source: National Patient and Procedure Volume Tracker, Strata Decision Technology

This is why it becomes essential for patients with chronic conditions to resume care, as restricting this care as "routine" could exacerbate a different type of public health crisis if conditions worsen.

YOUR ROADMAP TO RECOVERY

Automated outreach is an efficient and scalable method to proactively monitor chronically ill patients for symptom progression — intervening in real-time to evaluate clinical status, determine necessary treatment options, and avoid adverse events.

Approaches to Effectively Monitor Chronic Conditions

- **Use existing patient registries to identify populations** for enrollment in ongoing monitoring programs.
- **Personalize outreach based on condition types** and assess how external factors such as Social Determinants of Health may be impacting their condition.
- **Follow up with patients who indicate clinical changes** or adverse symptoms to perform necessary interventions and prevent deterioration of their condition.
- **Use automated outreach to inform patients** of telehealth options available to them and coordinate services.

> I am hoping we can use this pandemic's effect on healthcare in America as the push to **make the changes that allow us to care for more people at a lower cost."**
>
> — **Dr. Omar Lateef**
> **Chief Executive Officer**
> **Rush University Medical Center**

4 Maximize Your Telehealth Reimbursement

Perhaps the greatest trend we've seen coming out of the COVID-19 crisis has been the acceleration of telehealth options (including virtual visits by telephone or video) as an alternative to in-person care.

CMS and other commercial insurers are working to maintain seamless billing and reimbursement for these services, allowing providers to manage increased demand for telemedicine visits during the pandemic. For one thing, Medicare agreed to temporarily reimburse telehealth visits at the same rate as in-person appointments. As a result, many state Medicaid programs and private insurers have made telehealth options more accessible.

Whether or not these equitable reimbursements will continue remains to be seen, but Seema Verma, administrator for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, believes **"the advent of telehealth has been just completely accelerated, (and) that it's taken this crisis to push us to a new frontier, but there's absolutely no going back."**[9]

While telehealth options have seen a surge nationwide, many patient populations still lack the awareness and understanding to appropriately utilize them.

Common challenges for telehealth visits are that patients may forget about their appointments or have difficulty logging on if they don't receive assistance and reminders. **These reminders can also help to ensure the patient is prepared for the visit, including how to access it.** After these virtual visits, providers can follow up with patients to ensure they understand and are adhering to their care plans, and were satisfied with their experience.

Experts predict that **now that both hospitals and patients have gotten a taste of telehealth options, they are not likely to go away** even if the coronavirus does, particularly for patients with chronic conditions who may have issues with mobility or transportation.

Prior to the pandemic, NYU Langone Health logged about 25 virtual urgent care visits per day. Once video visits were expanded to non-urgent outpatient care — such as oncology, diabetes, and cardiology — **these visits skyrocketed to over 5,500 a day, on average.**[10]

As CMS and many private insurers have added or increased reimbursement for telehealth visits, there are a few ways in which your current **Post-Discharge Follow-Up program** can help to maximize this benefit:

Step 1

Identify patients who may benefit from a telemedicine visit (or consultation).

Step 2

Use automated post-discharge follow-up calls and texts to ask patients if they would like to schedule a telehealth visit.

Step 3

Connect eligible patients with relevant resources to complete the telehealth visit.

Step 4

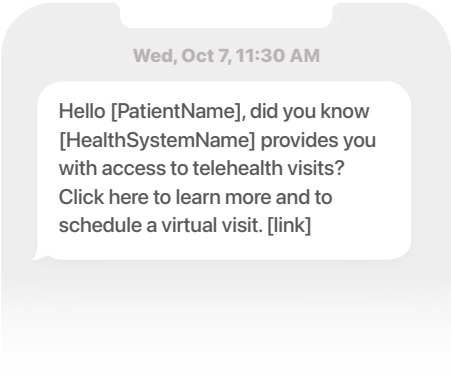
Document the visit and submit under the proper CPT code. For a list of the CPT codes that are in effect for telehealth as of May 1, 2020, see **here**.

YOUR ROADMAP TO RECOVERY

Hospitals and health systems must promote telehealth services to their communities as an entry point for care. This will expand your capacity for chronic disease management, preventive care, preliminary evaluation, and follow-up visits.

Approaches to Maximize Your Telehealth Reimbursement:

- **Deploy messaging** to your full population to explain the telehealth options your provider is offering and how to access them.
- **Use automation to schedule appointments** in conjunction with your telehealth provider.
- **Send an automated reminder** to let patients know when their appointment is scheduled, how to access it, and any information they may need in advance.
- **Use post-appointment follow-up to check in on and monitor** patients' conditions after their virtual visits, and where needed, schedule follow-up appointments via telehealth or in person.



CONTACT US FOR INFORMATION ON HOW AUTOMATED OUTREACH CAN HELP DRIVE PATIENT VOLUME, CREATE REVENUE, AND ENSURE CONTINUITY OF CARE

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Conclusion

Much has been written about the "new normal" in healthcare — but this state of normalcy appears to still be in flux, with the COVID-19 virus surging again throughout the country. One thing that is clear is that **providers need to be proactive in encouraging patients to seek the care that was deferred or cancelled during peak pandemic surge periods, even while they are treating COVID 19-patients.**

Norman "Ned" Sharpless, director of the National Cancer Institute, warned that **"delays in screenings, diagnoses, and treatment because of the coronavirus pandemic are likely to result in thousands of 'excess' deaths from [cancer] in coming years."**[11] Other chronic conditions, such as heart disease and diabetes, are also likely to realize devastating outcomes from care that has been put off too long.

As we look to the future of healthcare in a post-peak pandemic world, patients will require more guidance and education than ever before. **The organizations that quickly adapt to current and emerging healthcare delivery models will be poised for long-term financial success.**

Automated communication strategies can be used to engage patients whose care has been deferred, help close gaps in care, monitor chronically ill patients, and encourage healthcare delivery via telehealth during a pandemic. **Healthcare leaders can leverage these tools as they work to bring back revenue while ensuring safety protocols are maintained and access to care is expanded.**

CipherHealth is dedicated to helping our customers turn their bold vision for compassionate, coordinated, and patient-centered care into reality throughout this crisis and beyond. **We welcome your thoughts and experiences on how your hospital or health system has been managing during these difficult times.** And we look forward to equipping you with new tools and resources to help you on your journey to maximize revenue and ensure continuity of care well into the future.

SHARE YOUR STORIES OF RECOVERY WITH US

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Lyndsey Lord, MBA, BSN, RN brings over 15 years of experience in clinical practice, healthcare operations, case management, patient throughput, and healthcare IT strategy to her current role at CipherHealth. Prior to joining CipherHealth, Lyndsey worked with healthcare providers to implement alternative payment models, such as BPCI, and supported clinical care redesign efforts to promote success within value-based healthcare programs. Lyndsey is passionate about leveraging technology and data to assist providers in delivering high-quality, low-cost care.

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Lisa Romano, MSN, RN brings more than 25 years of experience in clinical practice, healthcare IT strategy, and healthcare operations to her current role. Prior to previous CNO roles, Lisa spent 19 years as a nurse and hospital administrator at Lehigh Valley Hospital and Health Network in Allentown, PA, where she was responsible for all patient flow and transfer center operations as well as numerous quality and patient satisfaction initiatives. Lisa is passionate about improving the health of patients across the healthcare continuum.

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CipherHealth is an award-winning and proven technology solutions partner committed to enhancing communication and care throughout the patient journey. Since 2009, CipherHealth has helped shape the patient engagement category, delivering groundbreaking products to help care providers effectively and efficiently provide quality care for their patients. CipherHealth's suite of patient engagement software sets new standards for care and empowers healthcare organizations to foster meaningful connections to ensure the best possible outcomes for staff members, patients, and their loved ones.

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