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*PROVEN PATHS
to Remove the 'Hate'
From Patients'
Love/Hate Attitude
TOWARD THEIR
DOCTORS*



Recent research shows the majority of patient-consumers have a love/hate attitude toward healthcare: they love the care they get personally from their doctor and hate pretty much everything else.

Even the term ‘patient-consumer,’ which may seem foreign to many providers, is moving mainstream as patients rapidly migrate toward making healthcare decisions in the same way they choose other products and services. It’s a more apt description of the trend where patients compare their healthcare delivery experience with their most recent online purchase or high-touch, interactive interaction with brands they use and enjoy.

Preston Gee, vice president of strategic marketing at Texas-headquartered CHRISTUS Health put it this way: “Patients are much more in the captain’s chair than they were even five years ago. It’s only going to get more consumer-centric from here.”

RESEARCH INSIGHTS

These highlights of research^{1,2} over the past couple of years underscore the shift from provider-centric to patient-consumer-centric decision making, and the related shift in attitudes.

The 'Love'

Overall, patients are pleased with the relationship they have directly with their providers. For example:

87% of patient comments praise clinicians' courtesy and respect.

53% of comments reflect positive clinical-staff communications.

The 'Hate'

On the other hand, consumers are increasingly frustrated with most other facets of their interaction.

77% are frustrated with long wait times - for appointments as well as in the waiting room.

67% felt disrespected by non-clinical staff (support staff, waiting rooms, billing, etc.).

34% complained about the billing and insurance process; another 40% were neutral.

34% have posted a negative review of their healthcare provider. The greatest concerns center on lack of connection and communication with the practice.

HOW PATIENT-CONSUMERS CHOOSE

The process patient-consumers follow in choosing a provider and choosing to stay long-term is shifting quickly to a consumer approach as well. This change is a reflection of peoples' quest for a more overall satisfying healthcare experience.

51% ranked convenience as the most important factor influencing their healthcare decisions. That was ahead of all other factors, including quality of care, which came in fifth place at 34%.

80% of respondents said they would switch providers for convenience factors alone.

74% of patients look online for information about a healthcare decision.

Feedback from online reviews from other patients is the most important factor in selecting a provider, with 75% ranking it first.

79% of patients are more likely to consider a provider with a strong average star rating.

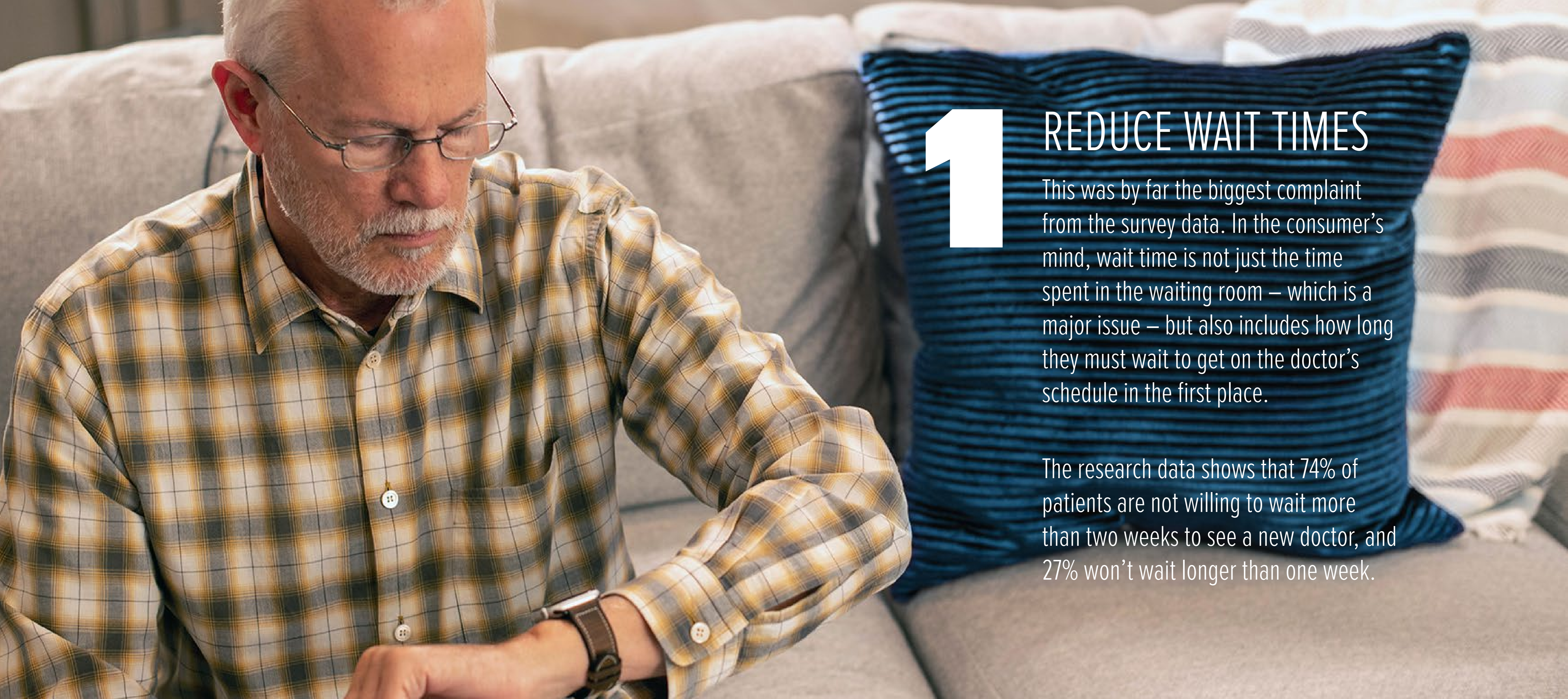
Based on this input directly from patient-consumers, here are five approaches proven to help reduce the 'hate' factor and replace it with positive attitudes toward the care experience your patient-consumers will receive.

¹ <https://nrchealth.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/2019-Healthcare-Consumer-Trends-Report.pdf>

² <https://www.patientpop.com/blog/online-reputation-reviews/what-patients-want-results-from-the-patientpop-2020-patient-perspective-survey/>



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1 REDUCE WAIT TIMES

This was by far the biggest complaint from the survey data. In the consumer's mind, wait time is not just the time spent in the waiting room – which is a major issue – but also includes how long they must wait to get on the doctor's schedule in the first place.

The research data shows that 74% of patients are not willing to wait more than two weeks to see a new doctor, and 27% won't wait longer than one week.

How to Fix Wait 'Hate'

Shift to telemedicine visits whenever possible.

Based on an analysis of visit-type fit and profitability, triage all incoming schedule requests to push as many as possible to a telemedicine visit. This will simultaneously address both the wait time and convenience issues. Check this guide for more detail: [Telemedicine Bible for Creating Great Patient Experiences](#).

Implement data-driven scheduling. If your practice is bumping up against provider capacity, triage and prioritize those appointment types that are highest focus, most efficient and profitability for your practice first.

Optimize workflows. Focus on improving efficiency, particularly in staff functions that received the highest negative survey feedback. A practice management system with a robust task management system will change the game in this area. The best systems include integrated task management and communications, and simple-to use dashboards that keep everyone on track in delivering peak quality service.

Manage no-shows. A robust reminder and rescheduling system can turn no-shows and late re-schedulers into a positive by opening up additional availability to shorten wait times. The best systems have integrated text or email reminders, waitlisting, and portal-based self-service rescheduling.



2 SUPER-COMMUNICATE

The root of many of the issues highlighted in the research was related to lack of good communication: making sure patients feel heard, respected and informed. Updated features integrated into a strong practice automation platform can significantly improve communications with a personalized touch while avoiding overtaxing maxed-out staff. Here are a few of the most effective approaches:

Automated text reminders.

Text has become far and away the preferred medium for communicating with patients about appointments, reminders and reschedules. Recent research showed 67% of patients prefer a text, vs. 16% for email and 13% phone. Make sure your practice management system has a simple, automated way to take this extremely important, but time-consuming task off the staff plate and leave it to the system. Of course, flexibility to communicate in the format that the patient prefers is always best.

Follow up task management.

Follow ups and closed-loop communication with patients can often fall through the cracks of busy clinic schedules and multiple

handoffs between providers and staff. As mentioned previously, a strong workflow and task management system helps ensure that follow ups are completed and the patient has received the feedback or information they need.

Fully utilize portal capabilities.

Make sure your patient portal is fully functional, and that patients can easily find and use its capabilities. An intuitive portal can quickly answer many routine questions that are pressing for patients and time-consuming for staff, including scheduling, lab and test results, refills, questions directly to a provider, and more.

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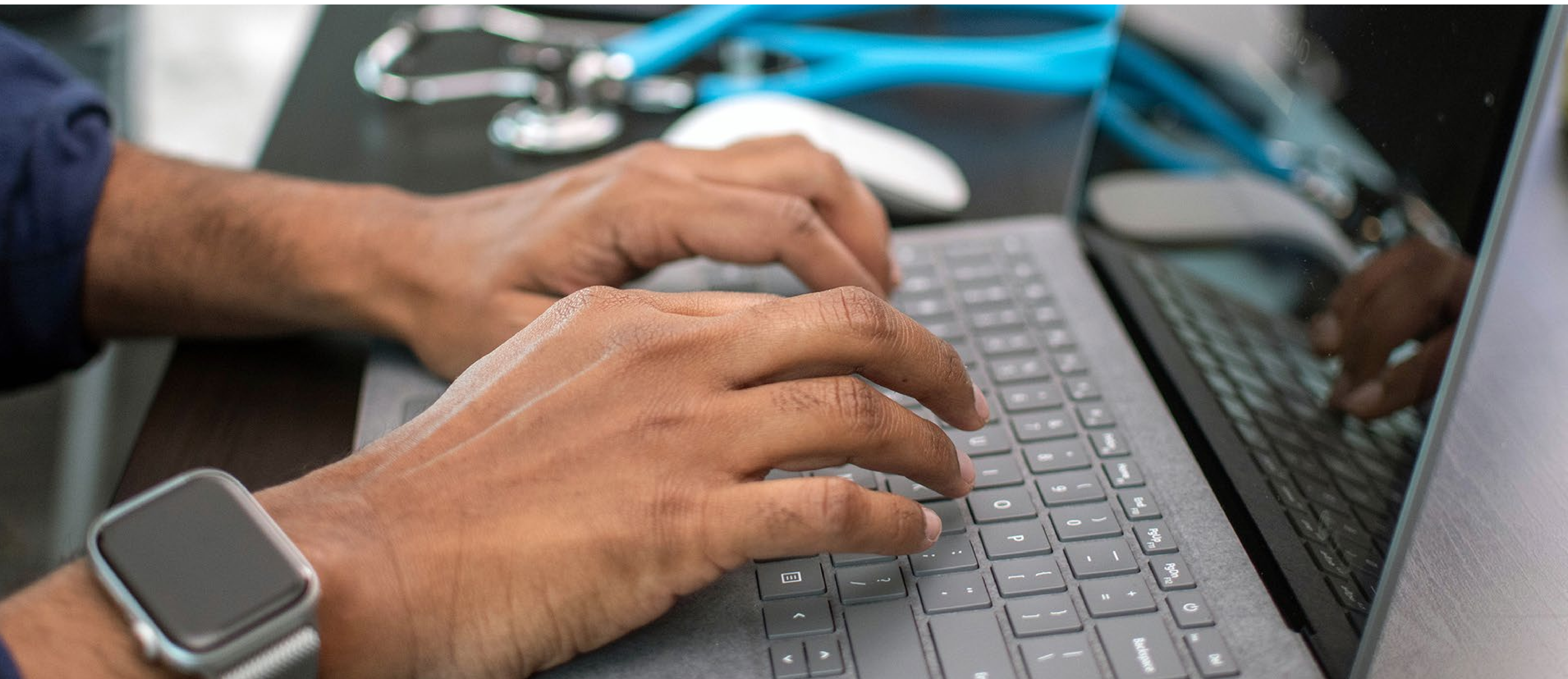
PAMPER YOUR ONLINE REPUTATION

Online reviews, social media feedback and other online sources have displaced the proverbial word of mouth foundation for a clinic's reputation. These days you must seriously manage your online reputation to keep feeling patients' love. Here's what you can do:

Nurture 4- and 5-star ratings. It makes a real difference. Nearly 60% of patients will ignore a practice with less than a 4-star rating.

Use automation to request reviews. Leading practice management platforms include automated systems for requesting and managing online reviews from recent patients. This is another area where automation can free up staff time while still delivering a personalized touch.

Respond directly to negative feedback. About one third (34%) of patients have posted a negative review of their healthcare provider. 58% of those patients were never contacted by the practice to try and resolve the issues. Not only does the practice miss the opportunity to resolve a problem and potentially keep a patient, but the negative backlash can be huge. Dissatisfaction in patients who weren't contacted by the practice increased a whopping 276%. That then becomes the message these people propagate out through their social channels and networks.





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UP YOUR CONVENIENCE

With convenience ranking so high in patients' decision hierarchy, it pays to look at ways to improve this factor for your practice. Here are a few things to consider:

Easy online scheduling. Self-serve scheduling and rescheduling from any device, any time day or night. That's the expectation from a growing number of new patients. Make sure your portal, scheduling and reminder systems can accommodate that need.

Dare we say it again? Expand telemedicine. Telemedicine visits are generally viewed as high on the convenience scale. Focus on expanding and promoting virtual visits wherever possible.

Office hour availability. The flip side of the telemedicine question is to reevaluate current

office hours in light of a potential shift in patient population and preference. Consider periodic expanded hours or rotating weekend schedules to catch those who are looking for greater flexibility in scheduling with your office.

Strong patient portal. The easier and faster a patient can find what they are looking for online, the more convenient it is for them. Whether it's office hours, the latest lab results, a message from the doctor, or access to billing and insurance information, quick access will strengthen their perception of how convenient it is to work with you.

5

RESPECTFUL STAFF

Because a large number of patients reported feeling disrespected by non-clinical staff (67%) this is another area to focus improvement efforts on. The problem is often not so much a surly staff personality issue as it is staff feeling overwhelmed or lacking tools to provide a better experience. Here are a few things that can help:

Task/People tradeoff. Implement workflow and task management systems referred to earlier with the expectation that staff will be freed up for more personal, focused people interactions.

Smooth billing interactions. Billing issues can also be a source of frustration for patients. Here again, good systems can provide billing staff with the tools needed for excellent service, and freedom to focus more intently on the people rather than the numbers. Resources like automated eligibility, text or email payment reminders, credit card on file, online payment portal and payment plans can reduce much of the tension around billing. Check out this eGuide for more information: [Patient Financial Engagement in a Post-COVID-19 World](#).

MOVING TOWARD LOVE/LOVE

Despite all the challenges, patient-consumers are still finding plenty to love about their doctors. With some concerted efforts in a few key areas that rank high on the ‘hate’ chart – convenience, wait time, reputation, respect and communication - you can create an interaction that rivals their favorite brand experience.

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