

Time for a Check Up

Addressing the unique challenges and opportunities for contact centers in the healthcare industry

by Tom Hubbard, CEO, Inova Solutions

The customer service arm of the United States healthcare industry has struggled in recent years to keep pace with rapid growth and change in the sector. Advances in medical technology and the aging of the baby boomer generation have contributed to an influx of patients in hospitals and clinics. In addition, the structure of healthcare organizations themselves has drastically changed, to include integrated healthcare delivery systems, managed care organizations, and other specialty service providers.

As a result of this rapid growth and restructuring, customer service and helpdesk contact centers must cope with new challenges, including multiple technology systems and a wide array of constituents. Often, these systems and groups have limited means of internal communication, which ultimately affects an organization's ability to serve its customers.

In addition, the healthcare provider landscape has become highly competitive. Gone are the days when patients held loyalty for their family doctor, regardless of the level of service. Today's healthcare consumers – patients, employers or government agencies – are increasingly demanding. They require an organization focused on customer service throughout the healthcare process, with a proven track record of high service levels and customer satisfaction.

Thanks to the viral, accessible nature of online media, modern healthcare organizations must also deal with an unprecedented level of transparency. Consumer watchdog groups routinely perform patient satisfaction surveys, and post the results of these surveys online for a world of prospective patients to see. Healthcare organizations must be aware that a patient's satisfaction level with his healthcare experience is only partially motivated by the quality of the medical care itself. He is also prone to draw conclusions based on his ongoing interactions with customer service representatives regarding appointment scheduling, billing, insurance inquiries, and other facets of modern healthcare.

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A customer's experience with customer service and helpdesk contact centers may shape their view of the entire organization. If your customer service representatives are seen as knowledgeable and competent, the caller will likely apply that feeling of trust to the organization as a whole. Suddenly they trust you and, by association, trust your medical professionals to provide the best possible care to them or their loved ones. In contrast, if a customer service representative is ill-equipped to provide

the caller with the information they need, a negative perception has been born that is quite difficult to reverse.

It is vitally important that customer service representatives are well-equipped to service the patient and his family at the highest possible level. If organizations recognize this new climate of customer service as an incentive to improve their service level and customer satisfaction, they will enjoy viral positive publicity rather than a bitter setback to their brand.

The Importance of Service Level

Inova Solutions knows, from decades of experience working with contact centers in the healthcare industry, how to improve service levels and other key performance indicators that impact the bottom line. It all comes down to targeted, immediate communication – if customer service representatives are kept up-to-date on important operational information, they are better equipped to do their jobs. This real-time awareness requires a simple and direct line of communication across the disparate branches of the contact center.

For example, when contact center managers are aware of real-time operational conditions, they can assign more agents to overloaded queues, and therefore reduce wait times and handle higher call volumes. If schedulers are aware of same-day appointment cancellations as they happen, they can quickly fill the spot with new patient appointments, maximizing utilization of expensive medical and

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human resources. If the patient record system is temporarily down, supervisors can quickly get a message out to all helpdesk representatives, informing them of the delay and expected resolution time, so that the agents are equipped to handle customer inquiries about the issue. Inova Solutions has seen simple operational adjustments such as these lead to significant improvements in service levels and customer satisfaction, as well as a reduction in operating costs.

Inova’s contact center middleware consolidates information from not only automatic call distributors, but also from virtually any data source in the contact center, including patient scheduling systems, workforce management systems, as well as internally-composed messages. This important data is then streamed in real-time to those who need it – displayed on an LED wallboard, LCD flat screen monitor, web-based management dashboard, or directly on customer service representatives’ computer desktops.

Contact Inova Solutions today to learn how real-time data consolidation and reporting has helped countless contact centers in the healthcare industry meet service level goals and retain profitable contracts.