Deloitte: Helping organizations elevate the healthcare consumer experience

The consumer experience is a significant focus in health care right now. What role does it play today, and how will that change in the future?

Matthew Hitch: Many consumers expect a different experience and set of interactions with their healthcare providers than they have had in the past, and this holds true across age groups and customer segments. If healthcare providers don't fully embrace the idea of customer-driven encounters, they can open themselves up to risk. First, their ability to attract and retain patients within their network can become severely limited, and second, payment contract mechanisms that are changing due to value-based care require a much closer patient-provider relationship, especially with the expectation that patients will start engaging in activities on their own to look after their health. So, unless the provider-patient relationship changes, an organization may compromise its ability to manage risk.

David Betts: The establishment of an online retail marketplace for insurance is pushing customers to view their relationships with healthcare providers in the same way as they view their interactions with other service providers, such as financial services companies—and so they are expecting the same level of customer care. In addition, as healthcare costs take a growing bite out of the customer's wallet, we are seeing individuals behave in economically rational ways. They are demanding a certain degree of service, quality, and value for their dollar. Value in the mind of the customer is not just clinical quality—there is a much greater emphasis on the service component as well.

What can healthcare executives learn about consumer engagement from other industries like financial services, retail, and hospitality?

Hitch: When seeking any kind of service, customers often tend to become frustrated when their needs are not easily met. Different industries do a variety of things to overcome this frustration, such as providing services online and through apps. Many successful companies, however, go a step further and engage with customers to design an experience around the customer's wants and desires. An obvious example is Uber. If you think about what matters to people trying to get a cab, they really want convenience and clarity.
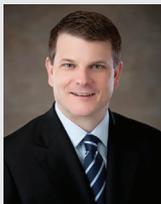
Hitch *Betts*

In this business profile, Matthew Hitch, Principal, and David Betts, Principal and leader for Customer & Digital Transformation for health care providers, at Deloitte Consulting LLP discuss the potential benefits of elevating the customer experience and ways to change service delivery.

When is the cab going to arrive? You can track it. Will the driver take credit cards? You don't have to worry about payment because that is already taken care of. Who will the driver be? This individual has been pre-screened. This level of convenience is what people are expecting, which is why Uber is disrupting the taxi marketplace. It's not because the taxi service itself is any different, but how the company delivers it.

Betts: I think healthcare organizations do have some additional complexities that must be addressed, but a key is that they can be addressed. Organizations should consider balancing security and privacy with access and transparency. These represent an internal tension that providers should be mindful of and manage proactively. In addition, there are many customer touch points along the healthcare encounter that at times even providers don't understand. So, you have to unwind some of those outdated touch points and challenge the status quo—all in the context of interacting with customers when they are at their most vulnerable.

Consumer expectations of value are evolving. What specifically are they looking for from the healthcare provider?

Betts: There are five main characteristics that customers look for in their healthcare interactions. First, they want things to be personal. Organizations should identify specific opportunities to connect with patients on a personal level. Second, they yearn for simplicity. Customers typically don't care how a hospital or physician practice is organized internally. The need to hand off information between departments, units, or processes doesn't matter to them. They just want the experience to be seamless and efficient. Third, patients don't want to be left waiting. I just saw a statistic that said that the time spent waiting in a doctor's office costs each of us $43 on average. By limiting wait times, organizations can make patients feel their time is valued. Fourth, people desire transparency, so they can clearly understand what is happening to them and why. Finally, they require security. Customers need to believe that everything they share with you will be safe and secure. They want to be confident that you have tight control over who accesses their most personal information.

Hitch: The question now is, which healthcare organizations are going to differentiate beyond the expected? Those that do will create moments that really matter to customers, cultivating stickiness. The reality is that organizations that enable a superior customer experience can not only get the payback on their investment, but also have stronger financial returns than their competitors.

What should healthcare providers keep in mind while developing strategies around consumer engagement? How should healthcare providers get started?

Betts: One of the most successful ways to elevate customer interactions is to engage the customer in redesigning the experience. Far too often we address our business problems by providing what *we think* the customers want or need, however walking in their shoes and doing research can get us closer to meeting their expectations. More specifically, you have to look beyond what they say and examine how they behave. This can provide insight into where you can take interactions and interventions to make the experience better. For instance, the Deloitte Center for Health Solutions *2015 Survey of US Health Care Consumers* found that although people say they want to communicate with a healthcare system using online tools and secure messaging, their actual use of these tools is very different. If we get caught up as an industry in trying to manage what we think customers desire, without doing deep ethnographic and customer-centric research to understand how people behave, we are going to build tools they won't use.

Are there any educational materials you would like to share to help healthcare providers in these efforts?

We recommend readers look at the Deloitte Center for health Solutions *2015 Survey of US Health Care Consumers* findings as well as *Health Care Consumer Engagement: No 'One-Size-Fits-All' Approach* as a starting point.

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