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Enhancing the Healthcare Experience through Improved Self-service Tools

The Case for a Human-Centered Approach

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INTRODUCTION

Advancements in technology are connecting patients and healthcare providers like never before. Modern digital tools and online systems can improve a patient's ability to manage their health. However, the user's experience can vary widely depending on the website, mobile app, or user interface design. Refining the design and usability of these online tools can be mutually beneficial for both healthcare providers and beneficiaries. Improving user experience is an important goal not just for private industry, but for federal healthcare agencies as well. This Issue Brief highlights how improving online self-service tools benefits all parties by limiting administrative tasks, reducing provider burden, and improving user experience.

THE ISSUES

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, more people are using online tools and services to manage their healthcare needs.[1] Unfortunately, the complexity of healthcare systems can lead to platforms that are confusing, difficult to navigate, and offer a poor user experience.[2] As a result, healthcare administrators must make their websites, tools, and apps more accessible, functional, and user-friendly.

The transition to — and complexity of — online health platforms also has implications for the public sector. In December 2021, the Biden Administration issued an Executive Order requiring federal healthcare agencies to transform federal customer experience and service delivery.[3] More specifically, this Executive Order requires the Department of Health and Human Services to design and deliver new, personalized online tools and expanded customer support options for Medicare enrollees.

Poor user experience is often associated with the following issues:

SLOW LOADING TIMES

LIMITED AVAILABILITY OF CUSTOMER SUPPORT

INADEQUATE FUNCTIONALITY

DIFFICULTY NAVIGATING THE PLATFORM

ABUNDANCE OF MARKETING CONTENT

IMPROPER VOICE OR TONE OF THE CONTENT AND IMAGES

SECURITY/PRIVACY CONCERNS

INFORMATION OVERLOAD

Moreover, there is sometimes a clear disconnect between what insurance companies, medical practices, and beneficiaries want in a healthcare website, app, or other user interface. The unfortunate reality is that sometimes developers overestimate their ability to understand what users are experiencing or seeking to accomplish, resulting in websites or tools that demonstrate some of the issues listed above.

Spotlight On The Answer

SOLUTIONS

Both providers and beneficiaries can use online self-service portals for a variety of healthcare management needs, including scheduling appointments, estimating costs, viewing billing statements, managing accounts, searching historic patient data, verifying insurance coverage, and more. Thus, developing effective, easy to use online self-service portals has significant advantages for both patients and providers. There are three key pillars that will facilitate the ability to improve user experience: Integrating a Human-centered design, leveraging data and feedback, and enhancing usability through simplicity.
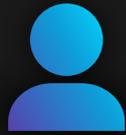
INTEGRATING A HUMAN CENTERED DESIGN

LEVERAGING DATA AND FEEDBACK

ENHANCE USABILITY THROUGH SIMPLICITY

SOLUTIONS

INTEGRATING A HUMAN CENTERED DESIGN

One essential method of delivering a more positive user experience is by integrating human-centered design (HCD) into self-service tools and other public-facing platforms. Integrating HCD means being attuned to the perspectives, needs, and limitations of the end user and incorporating that understanding into a platform's design.[4] An HCD approach, rooted in empathy and collaboration, offers a human lens when designing platforms. This methodology includes hearing the voices of the user base and developing solutions collaboratively. This approach takes into account the different situations that might impede a user's ability to use self-service tools, such as cognitive impairment, limited dexterity, poor vision, or elevated anxiety.[5] Ultimately, communication between the online platform and the end user should feel genuine and as if there were a human on the other side at all times.

LEVERAGING DATA AND FEEDBACK

Leveraging collected data and maintaining feedback loops are core components for refining processes, creating better self-service tools, and ultimately improving user satisfaction. In order to create websites, apps, and other platforms that cater to the needs and wants of users, one first has to understand what those needs and wants are. Healthcare organizations can better understand user needs and experiences through focus groups or conducting surveys. Gathering and acting on this feedback is vital for refining platforms and meeting the user's needs.

Not just a one-time event, healthcare organizations must stay connected with the communities they serve by maintaining a feedback loop. Regularly re-engaging with communities reveals if changes are having intended effects or if further adjustments are needed. As healthcare evolves, healthcare platforms must evolve along with it.

SOLUTIONS

ENHANCE USABILITY THROUGH SIMPLICITY

Enhancing usability is all about providing technology that enables end-users to do more. While dealing with healthcare can often be confusing or frustrating, navigating a self-service portal shouldn't be. Creating a simplified, user-friendly system can make all the difference.

To achieve a user-friendly platform — and ultimately improve patient experience — healthcare organizations should ensure each element of the platform is simple, intuitive, and functional. Presenting an organized interface with clear instructions and intuitive navigation to the right information creates a less overwhelming and confusing experience. Maintaining consistent design, keeping communication concise, and placing the right information in the right location are also essential for an improved user experience. A visually appealing and user-friendly platform maximizes usability and increases the chance of continued use – thus helping achieve customer experience goals.

While redesigning a healthcare management system can seem like a daunting task, the benefits are clear. Not only do user-friendly tools enable increased engagement, they also enable the provider and patient to do more. This means reduced administrative burdens, streamlined workflows, fewer customer care phone calls, and less paperwork. Ultimately, better tools allow healthcare programs to achieve their mission without added strain on already overworked staff.

INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVE

Americans accessing digital healthcare services need simple, intuitive platforms to obtain assistance as easily as possible. In February 2022, National Government Services launched a functional, easy-to-use self-service provider portal that benefits Medicare providers as well as their patients. By creating a highly intuitive user interface and simplifying processes, health professionals can better serve the needs of the patient.

The modernized portal was crafted on the principle of human-centered design (HCD) to ensure a seamless experience for all users. After consolidating two disparate legacy systems, the new streamlined interface and refined processes made it much easier for providers to perform critical functions such as verifying patient eligibility. HCD necessitates feedback, which is why maintaining a consistent communication loop with Medicare providers to get their direct and targeted input is vital to making informed decisions. This feedback increased portal usability, set the tone for a simplified experience, and yielded additional self-service options that were not available in the legacy systems. As a result, users are now able to access the resources and information they need with ease.

Leveraging data and incorporating customer feedback is a continual process that leads to refining and introducing new enhancements as they're identified to improve user experience. The continued evolution of healthcare platforms prevents large applications from becoming outdated and reinforces the trust and commitment between providers and patients. National Government Services is proud to be a key part of strengthening that trust by empowering federal health agencies to improve lives and communities.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

With millions of Americans using online tools to manage their healthcare, it's absolutely essential that healthcare organizations ensure these tools are developed with their needs in mind. Healthcare websites, apps, and self-service tools are core elements of the healthcare process. Fostering a positive experience in healthcare requires a human-centered approach that accounts for the needs of the user. In today's world, a patient's first interaction with a healthcare organization can often be online, so building a user-friendly platform can be a crucial step in improving the quality of interaction between the patient and the provider. Lastly, healthcare organizations should endeavor to regularly gather feedback from users so that their needs are understood. Similar to how modern medicine has revolutionized how we save lives, modern technology and tools can transform how beneficiaries view their healthcare.

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National Government Services makes transformation meaningful by empowering federal healthcare agencies to improve lives and communities. We design processes for progress and bridge the technology gap to make IT an enabler of healthcare, not an obstacle to operations. We empower federal health agencies to deliver care to millions of Americans through outcome-driven innovation.

Learn more at https://ngsservices.com/

ENDNOTES

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