TeleVox

Health Systems Discover the Value of "Low-Effort Engagement"

Automated, interactive engagement systems improve the patient experience while alleviating staffing burdens and burnout.

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Fewer Staff, Frustrated Patients

Staffing shortages have long been an issue within healthcare, but today more than one-quarter of hospitals say they are either experiencing or anticipating critical shortages. These growing concerns, according to one analysis, are a result of demographic shifts, pandemic challenges and other broader economic trends.

Today's staffing challenges are not just having a detrimental impact on health system operations and profitability due to lower visit volumes. The downstream effects of these shortages amplify overwork and burn-out issues for remaining staff, and contribute to a declining experience for patients who face appointment delays, greater telephonic hold times and lower engagement overall. This, in turn, contributes to a cycle of care gaps and reduced revenue. In fact, a survey of nursing executives also showed that nearly half (41 percent) say staffing shortages have a negative impact on the patient experience at their organization.

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IT Executives Look to Improve the Patient Experience, Address Staffing Concerns

A recent Intrado survey demonstrates that health IT leaders are grappling with these same issues as they plan future-state technology investments and strategy. Ninety-one percent of respondents stated that their first priority is to improve the patient experience and nearly half are looking for technology-enabled solutions that can reduce call center workload in response to staffing constraints. These goals make sense in the current care environment, especially given that more than one-third of respondents said their organizations are still relying on manual, phone-based interventions for patient engagement in an increasingly competitive labor market.

A recent industry survey shows that efforts to improve the patient experience have grown significantly over the past two years.

From Scheduling to Referrals, Automated Solutions Emerge

Of course, one highly effective strategy to improve the patient experience is the engagement of patients along their care journey—including before and after clinical interactions. However, almost 63 percent of respondents to another prominent industry survey said the "time investment required by health teams" is their biggest challenge in integrating patient engagement into care delivery.

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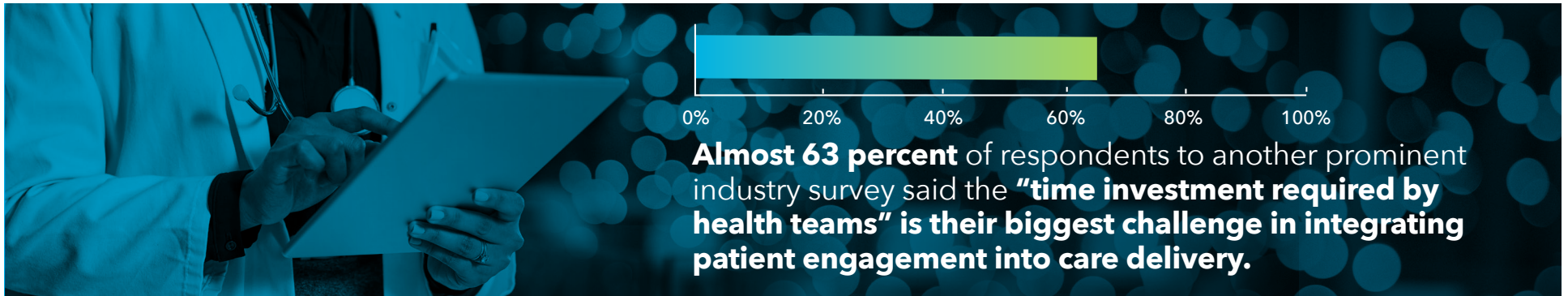
Today, many organizations don't even have the capacity to answer inbound calls, much less conduct the outbound calls required to effectively improve the patient experience (and patient care) by delivering proactive outreach. This includes strategic, well-timed pre- and post-procedure prep, transition care, and recall efforts for preventive care gaps.

It's no wonder, with resource and staffing constraints at an all-time high, that health systems are looking for a technology-enabled approach to maintaining patient engagement efforts without taxing employees. Fortunately, one digital solution already used by many leading health systems today to manage patient scheduling is ideally suited to this task.
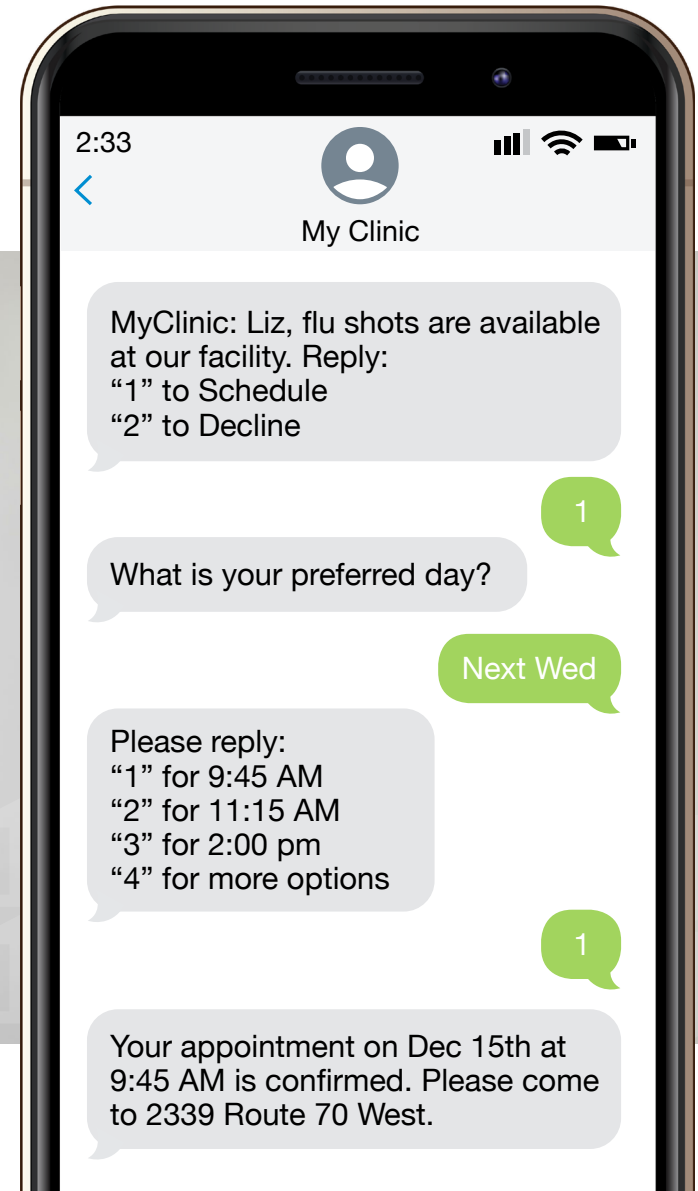
The Solution

The most powerful automation platforms can deliver interactive engagement that keeps patients in the know—and in control—without adding to staff burdens. Rather than simply sending one-way communications, such platforms support two-way outreach by deeply embedding into existing electronic health records (EHRs). This approach allows patients to respond to these communications, mimicking the dialogue typically conducted by overworked staff.

SENDER · · · One-Way Communications · · · ▶ **RECEIVER**

Two-Way Communications

FEEDBACK

Entire workflows can be easily automated with minimal human involvement, including more complex outreach related to vaccinations and even referral management. This strategy is in line with an overall shift toward less human-intensive technologies, a top trend for health systems dealing with labor shortages according to industry experts.

Interactive Digital Engagement in Action

To see how these automated interactions can replace human-powered outreach, consider the following example of a two-way conversation that takes place over SMS via an advanced digital engagement platform:

2:33

My Clinic

MyClinic: Liz, flu shots are available at our facility. Reply:
"1" to Schedule
"2" to Decline

1

What is your preferred day?

Next Wed

Please reply:
"1" for 9:45 AM
"2" for 11:15 AM
"3" for 2:00 pm
"4" for more options

1

Your appointment on Dec 15th at 9:45 AM is confirmed. Please come to 2339 Route 70 West.

Looking Under the Hood of Today's Advanced Automation Platforms

By using advanced automation technologies that leverage data pushed and pulled from the EHR, health systems can design highly personalized messages that allow patients to request information, connect with live staff (only when needed), and reschedule appointments or ask questions. This outreach can be conducted according to patient preferences, which today often means SMS communications.

Personalized Communication

These messages can connect patients directly with staff and even incorporate throttling preferences to ensure patients receive communications at the right time when call volumes are more manageable. This supports a more manageable staff workload and creates a better patient experience by reducing wait times and eliminating the need for callers to navigate complex phone trees.

Message Throttling

The interactive nature of these communications can easily replace many human-powered interactions that are costly in terms of staff time and resources—like repeatedly calling patients to remind them about pre-procedure instructions or sending notices that a payment is overdue. Deeply embedded solutions will also automatically document patient responses directly into the EHR, eliminating the need for manual data entry.

Time and Cost Effective

Perhaps most importantly, such systems require little to no learning curve, as staff members setting up or managing automation campaigns are doing so using system features they already know and use daily. Those that feature easy self-setup will minimize delays caused by the need for IT support. *This intuitive, time-saving approach allows overtaxed staff to focus their energy where it's really needed—on patient care.*

Seamless Integration

The Implications of Conversational, Automated Engagement

There are a variety of ways that health systems can leverage automation to increase visit volumes and improve the patient experience with more limited staff. The following example showcases the human-powered, manual outreach required for one such engagement effort–reminding patients about a due or overdue mammogram. It also depicts the automated, interactive engagement approach that can replace this time-consuming outreach, requiring fewer staff hours, less energy and a reduced cognitive burden:

Manual, Staff-Based Approach	Automated, Interactive Engagement Approach
Step 1: Export data or otherwise analyze patients in need of outreach	**Step 1:** EHR gathers a list of patients due for a mammogram and exports this data to the digital engagement platform.
Step 2: Access the patient record in the EHR to obtain a phone number	**Step 2:** Patients are automatically engaged via interactive SMS or voice calls depending on the patient's preferred communication channel and language preference in the EHR. Patients can respond directly to this outreach to schedule or even reschedule appointments.
Step 3: Initial phone call, potential voicemail	
Step 4: Follow-up call	
Step 5: Patient portal notice sent	**Step 3:** Appointment is booked in the EHR, and patients have the option to reschedule when they receive an automated reminder, if needed. If the patient declines, this information is also written back to the system, providing an opportunity for later follow-up.
Step 6: Patient calls to schedule, waits on hold, finally reaching a live scheduler	
Step 7: Staff manually inputs the appointment into schedule	
Step 8: Patient decides they cannot make the scheduled appointment and either no-shows or must call in and wait on hold (repeat steps 6, 7)	

The importance of just-in-time outreach.

This same EHR-embedded approach can also maximize message personalization based on health and demographic data in the patient's record. This is critical because the use of automation without personalization, proper cadence or context can overwhelm patients with too many messages that don't feel relevant or meaningful.

The Result

- **Patient convenience**

- **Less staff workload**

- **Improved response and compliance rates**

- **Increased visit volumes**

- **Improvements to quality scores and reimbursement**

Health Systems Pivot Toward Automation

Labor shortages and resource challenges continue to plague all types of industries, but they are particularly detrimental in healthcare, where patients depend on staff interactions to help them navigate a complex care delivery system. While health systems have ramped up efforts to improve the patient experience over the past two years, staffing concerns may stall these programs unless these organizations dramatically rethink their patient engagement approach.

In order to effectively replace human interactions with automation, health IT leaders will need to weigh essential attributes like personalization, ease of use and interactivity as they identify potential digital solutions.
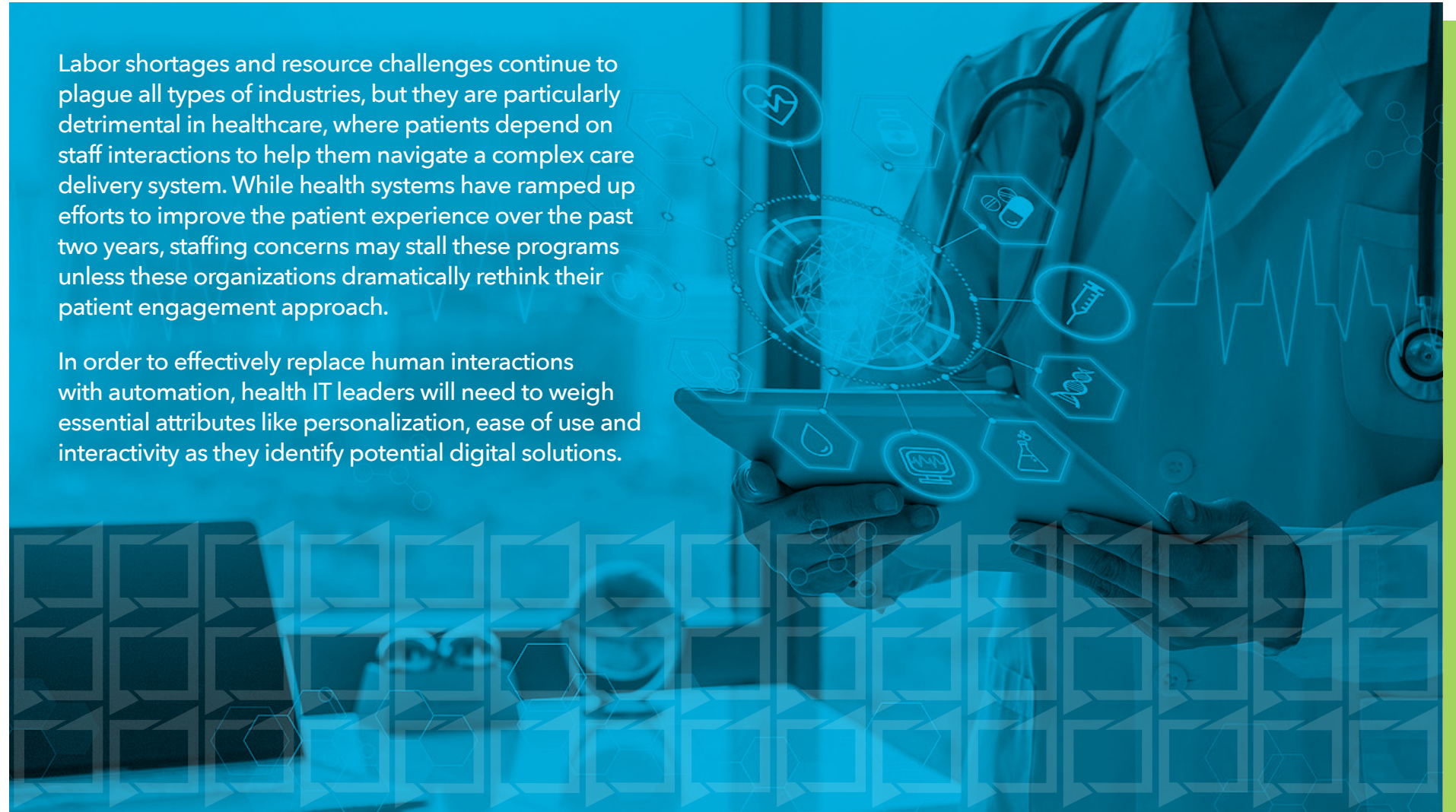
How Intrado Can Help Your Organization

To understand how your organization can assess these features and make the shift toward interactive, automated engagement, contact Intrado Healthcare today by emailing HouseCallsPro-Inquire@intrado.com.

Or to learn more about how other IT leaders are planning to retool engagement to optimize the patient experience and reduce staff burdens, download the latest Intrado report featuring survey data from members of the College of Healthcare Information Management Executives (CHIME).