

Younger Generations Shun Traditional Forms of Care

A recent survey on the future of healthcare by Accenture has revealed that younger generations are increasingly turning away from traditional settings of healthcare. But the shift in preference to telemedicine solutions is expected to generate new liability and privacy risks that healthcare providers have not previously encountered.

The Accenture survey, based on a large cross generational sample of 8,000 patients, highlights the frustration younger generations have with traditional forms of care when it comes to meeting their needs. It found that younger people are largely “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” with traditional settings of care. Highlighting this point the survey reveals that generation z and millennials are less likely to have a primary care physician than older generations. While 84% of baby boomers have a primary care physician, only 67% of millennials and 55% of generation z do. It is a stark downward trend.

It isn't difficult to speculate on the reasons why; tech savvy younger generations who have grown up in the digital age want convenient, fast services accessible through mobile device when they want. This runs counter to the often rigid setting of traditional primary care.

With millennials due to become the largest generation this year this trend poses a challenge for healthcare providers in attracting and retaining patients.

When asked what new capabilities, they wanted to see, 53% of the consumers polled by Accenture said that being provided with remote monitoring devices would increase their likelihood of choosing a provider, while approximately half said they wanted to communicate with their provider through video conferencing.

Across all age groups acceptance of virtual care is increasing with 29% of respondents saying they had used some form of virtual care.

However providers who are considering adopting technology to improve the patient experience should first consider the risks of doing so. The combination of healthcare and technology creates unique risks for healthcare providers which, if not managed properly, could compromise the quality of care and patient privacy.

Whereas in traditional settings of care doctors are reliant on their skill and knowledge, the adoption of technology introduces an additional dependency. For example, here a remote diagnosis hinges on electronic images taken by the patient, the medical professional needs to have confidence that it is of sufficient quality to make an accurate diagnosis. If the patient is using equipment to send data, such as blood sugar levels or heart rate, the equipment needs to be fully functional and to be used appropriately.

Data privacy risks are an additional concern. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) imposes onerous requirements on entities entrusted with maintaining the privacy of "individually identifiable health information". The real time transfer of electronic medical through video, voice and pictures must be done with safeguards in place to protect personal health information. If the personal health information isn't adequately protected then providers will leave themselves open to a data breach and HIPAA violation.

Those medical professionals who use telemedicine should discuss their existing coverages with their insurance agent to ensure they are adequately covered. By working with trusted partners to evaluate the risks posed by the technology they are employing, these risks can be mitigated.

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