FIVE FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENTS OF THE RIGHT DIGITAL FRONT DOOR: AN URGENT NEED

By Mark Boudreau, *Healthfully, Chief Operating Officer*

Health systems face several market imperatives that are being propelled by an array of industry forces. These imperatives are interrelated and together help organizations chart a successful course toward consumer-centricity and care delivery transformation:

- Preventing intermediation of the patient relationship by direct competitors and non-traditional entrants offering consumer health and wellness services such as Apple and Amazon.
- Unifying a single brand-experience for consumers across a health system's range of care settings, partners, and affiliates.
- Establishing one convenient digital front door (DFD) through which consumers can seamlessly engage any available service, or be guided to the appropriate service based on need.
- Ensuring DFD open architecture to allow aggregation and integration of multiple, domain-specific patient Apps and third party devices.
- Supporting the DFD with a robust integration platform to allow seamless integration with internal enterprise systems (EMR, EHR, HIS, Payments/Finance, ERP, AI/BI).

This article explores these imperatives, examining the urgency for change, the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, and the five foundational requirements of a truly effective solution.

URGENT NEED FOR PROGRESS

Making progress toward these imperatives is growing more urgent. Health and wellness in general needs to advance the pace of change. Several studies have demonstrated that despite forward motion, substantial gaps remain in the industry in implementing engaging digital health. For example, a late 2019 survey of health professionals found that only 58% say they have a good understanding of the digital tools most beneficial for consumers and patients.[1] (See Figure 1) Fewer still have successfully integrated digital health into their patient experience strategies (40%) or believe they are delivering digital experiences akin to those in the consumer space (32%). For each of these statements, the percentage of respondents strongly agreeing was 15% or less.

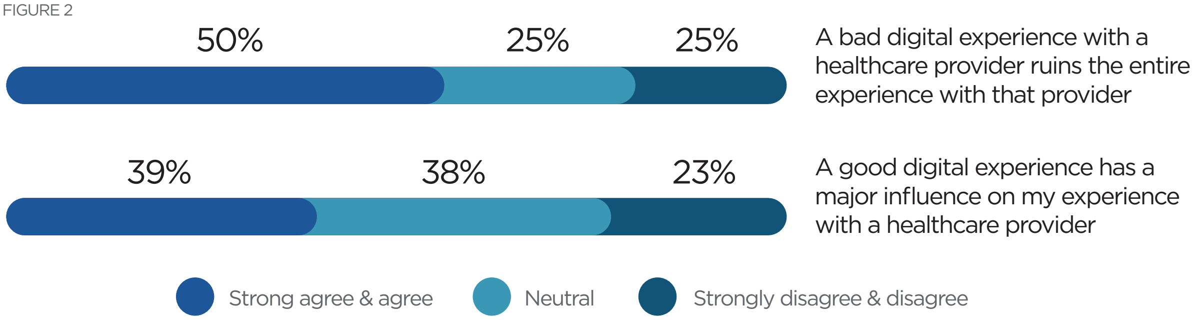
[1] Center for Connected Medicine, *The Future of the Digital Patient Experience*, 2020.

FIGURE 1

Rate your agreement with the following statements

One of the key ramifications of underperformance with digital health tools is that patients/consumers are increasingly sensitive to the level of digital experience being offered in comparison to other industry experiences. Figure 2 displays results from an Accenture survey showing that 50% of patients feel poor digital experiences induce negative perceptions about providers, while 39% say good digital interactions have a major effect on overall provider experience.[2]

FIGURE 2



Getting on the right side of the digital experience curve is crucial given the technology-savvy competitors entering healthcare. As another consultant warns, "If traditional healthcare organizations struggle to align care and business models around consumer-centric systems, industry disrupters will be poised to fill this void and better meet consumers' needs in the market."[3]

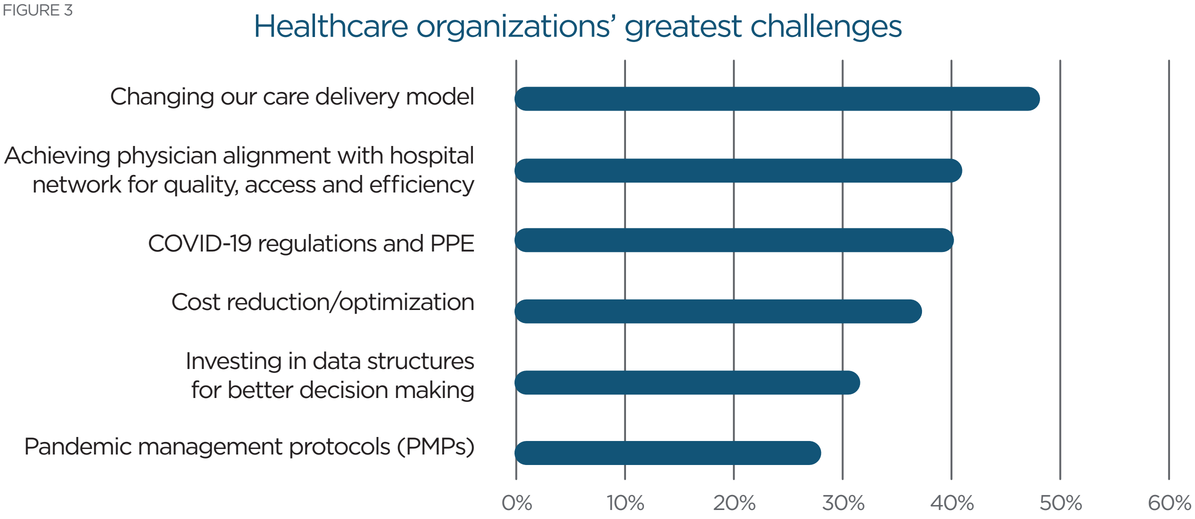
RE-ORDERED PRIORITIES: THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS

The pandemic has brought major disruption to healthcare and the nation's economy. What are the implications for progress on consumer health initiatives? Exposure to telemedicine, remote monitoring and other technology interactions has no doubt fueled

[2] Accenture, *Digital is Transforming Health, So Why is Consumer Adoption Falling: 2020 Digital Health Consumer Survey*, 2020.
[3] Huron Consulting Group, *Huron 2020 Healthcare Executive Research: Accelerating Stability and Growth*, 2020.

consumer interest in more and better digital experiences. At the same time, the crisis has underscored for healthcare organizations the clear need to change the care delivery model, as the recent survey results shown in Figure 3 attest.[4]

FIGURE 3



Too often, though, virtual care solutions have been implemented as a one-off solution for COVID-19, and not well-integrated with existing delivery models. The opportunity exists to build on this start and create a more comprehensive and cohesive digital consumer strategy that is interoperable with clinical service delivery and clinical systems. As the study cited above concludes, "improving care delivery will be about more than tweaking existing service lines; forward-thinking leaders are preparing their organizations to provide care along a continuum from wellness to episodic care to chronic care management via a seamless delivery system."

WHAT IS NEEDED TO MAINTAIN MOMENTUM

Health systems have an opportunity to take advantage of the disruptions caused by the crisis to advance significantly toward that seamless delivery system. I have detailed in previous articles one of the key success factors in this endeavor: the right kind of digital front door. This DFD is not an incremental step, reliant on legacy systems and portals designed for clinical and financial priorities rather than consumer health experience. The right DFD offers a user-friendly app as part of a comprehensive platform that connects an organization's digital health ecosystem to form a unified health experience for all participants.

FIVE FOUNDATIONAL PLATFORM ELEMENTS

The strategic imperatives described at the outset map directly to five core elements that a digital front door and consumer health platform must possess:

- **Common consumer engagement functions across all services.** One user interface presents a set of meaningful consumer engagement functions that work the same way

[4] Huron Consulting Group, *Huron 2020 Healthcare Executive Research: Accelerating Stability and Growth*, 2020.

across all services. Consumer information is captured once and shared across services for a consistent, synergistic and seamless consumer experience.

- **Interoperability with existing EMRs and enterprise systems.** Strong integration capability is vital. All functions and data collection should work seamlessly with existing provider and enterprise solutions. Since some service providers or social workers lack access to certain digital tools, the DFD should also offer convenient provider options for functions such as Calendar, Case Notes, TeleVideo, and Case Management.
- **Singular brand experience across partners and community providers.** Branding and flexible commercial terms will enable the use of the platform by partners to create a consistent brand experience for consumers.
- **Consolidation and aggregation of domain-specific apps.** The essence of delivering an effective experience is the ability to simplify the often confusing array of engagement apps, websites, and portals by replacing or tightly integrating them into one platform. APIs and open architecture are essential to enabling aggregation of specialty and domain-specific Apps, as well as to add or swap any third-party specialty tools as the organization's needs expand or change.
- **Longitudinal personal health and wellness record (Consumer Persona) for better outcomes.** Value-based, population health, and outcome-based financial models all require information that extends beyond clinical data in order to be successful. The right DFD is able to construct a rich "consumer persona" by collecting homogeneous data across all service encounters and personal health activities.

Together, these five elements form a vital foundation for putting in place a platform that optimizes the digital consumer experience and positions providers for success in meeting healthcare's current and emerging imperatives.

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