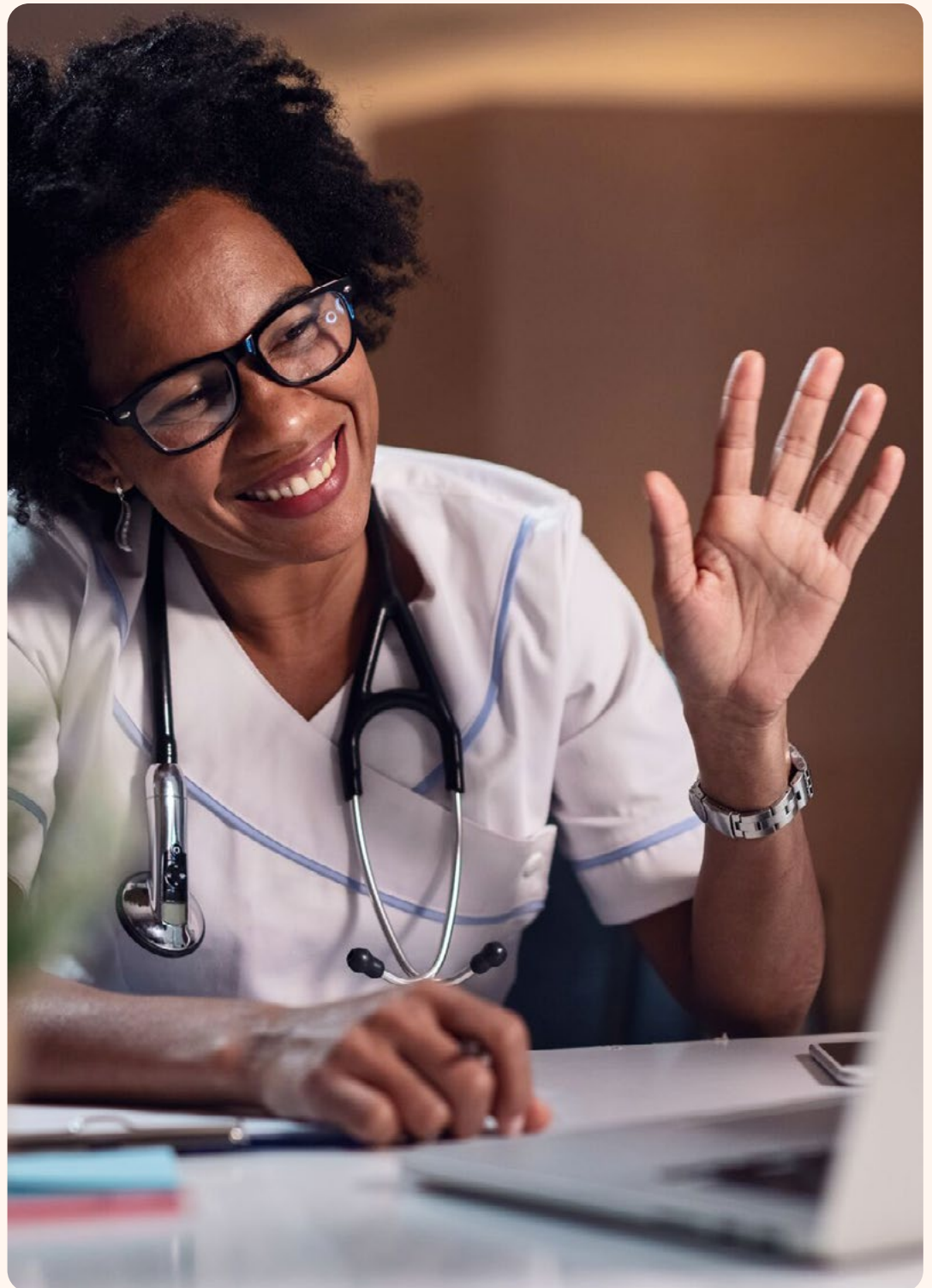


# Guide to effective healthcare communication



# Strategies for timely, personalized, and engaging interactions



Communication is undeniably a critical factor in the success of any healthcare organization. The ability to effectively communicate with patients, colleagues, and the wider community can significantly impact the quality of care provided. When communication is handled adeptly, it facilitates the delivery of personalized, timely care that meets the unique needs of each patient. [Boston Consulting Group](#) reports that by personalizing the patient experience, in just 6 to 12 months, healthcare organizations see “customer experience improve by 10%, administrative costs drop by 5% to 10%, and quality standards increase by 20% to 25%.”

On the other hand, when communication falters, even the most skilled physicians and advanced technologies may struggle to maintain the organization’s standing. The average physician has the potential to see 15,000 patients during their career. The impact of poor communication on that scale has the potential to be catastrophic.

In today’s rapidly evolving healthcare landscape, establishing a robust communication strategy is paramount. The task may seem daunting, but it is by no means insurmountable. By employing the right techniques and tools, healthcare organizations can foster an environment of effective communication, ensuring compliance with industry standards while optimizing patient care.

One crucial aspect of a successful communication strategy is tailoring messages to the specific needs and preferences of patients. Effective communication goes beyond simply providing information; it involves providing patients with timely and helpful reminders, ensuring that their experience is personalized, and addressing them in a clear and empathetic manner. If we were to take a page out of the great philosopher, Aristotle, the path to this success is by focusing on credibility, empathy, and logic (also known as ethos, pathos, and logos). By taking the time to engage with patients on a personal level, healthcare professionals can leverage these pillars to foster trust and enhance the overall patient experience.

## Investing in communication technology

A well-designed communication strategy encompasses various digital channels and platforms to reach patients and the community at large. In today's digital age, leveraging technology can greatly enhance communication efforts. Healthcare organizations can utilize secure messaging platforms, patient portals, and telehealth services to facilitate seamless and convenient communication with patients. According to [our research](#), the imperative to

invest in these systems is greater than ever and healthcare brands expect to double their investment in digital customer engagement by 2026.

## Staying in compliance

Moreover, maintaining compliance with industry regulations and standards is essential for healthcare organizations. The communication strategy should align with privacy and security requirements, such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) in the United States. Safeguarding patient information, ensuring secure transmission of data, and obtaining informed consent for communication-related activities are vital components of a compliant communication strategy. And it's not easy. According to the [HIPAA Journal OCR report](#), healthcare breaches are on the rise: "there has been an upward trend in data breaches over the past 14 years, with 2021 seeing more data breaches reported than any other year since records first started being published by OCR." It's more important than ever to put measures in to protect patient communication from these types of breaches.



The average physician has the potential to see **15,000** patients during their career

# Strategic communication for healthcare



According to the [AMA Code of Ethics](#), “to enable patients to participate meaningfully in decisions about healthcare, physicians have a responsibility to provide information and help patients understand their medical condition and options for treatment.” Effective communication is an indispensable element of success for healthcare organizations. By investing in a strategic communication strategy, organizations can provide personalized, timely care to their patients and foster strong relationships with the community they serve. Implementing such a strategy requires a comprehensive approach that incorporates patient-centered communication, the appropriate use of technology, and adherence to regulatory requirements. By continually refining and adapting their communication practices, healthcare organizations can stay at the forefront of providing high-quality care while meeting the evolving needs of their patients.

## Elements of strategic healthcare communication:



**1. Mastering timely communication**



**2. Enhancing patient engagement and satisfaction**



**3. Simplify medical language**



**4. Create healthy feedback loops**



**5. Safeguarding data privacy and protected health information (PHI)**



**6. Leveraging chatbots for enhanced healthcare communication**



**7. Enhancing healthcare accessibility and convenience through remote patient care**

**Let's dive in! →**

## Mastering timely communication



In the realm of healthcare communication, timeliness plays a crucial role in ensuring effective delivery of messages. One example of the importance of timely communication is demonstrated by Well Health, a healthcare organization that leveraged Twilio's technology to enhance their communication efforts. By adopting proactive measures and leveraging trusted technology platforms, healthcare organizations can ensure that communication reaches its recipients promptly. This can be achieved by scheduling SMS and email messages to be delivered at the appropriate moment, allowing healthcare organizations to disseminate community updates, important announcements, or personalized reminders about upcoming appointments in a timely manner. By strategically timing these communications, healthcare providers can enhance engagement and minimize the likelihood of missed information or appointments.

In the context of healthcare communication, it is generally advisable to err on the side of over-communication rather than under-communication. Waiting for patients to initiate contact with concerns can lead to heightened anxiety and a sense of neglect. Instead, healthcare organizations should prioritize providing upfront information and proactively addressing potential questions or concerns before they arise. By taking a proactive approach to communication, healthcare providers can establish trust, promote transparency, and empower individuals to make informed decisions about their healthcare.



Change the healthcare industry's customer service reputation by providing a fully customizable communication platform that allows hospitals to have seamless conversations with their patients.

### Solution

Contact Center, Phone System, SMS Support

### Founded

2015

### Headquarters

Santa Barbara, Calif.

### Related products

Programmable Messaging

Email (Twilio SendGrid)

Programmable Voice

### Related products

Programmable Messaging

Twilio Segment

### The results

**200K+** providers on platform

**1.1B** messages sent to 37 million patients annually

**100+** use cases supported

A key aspect of on-time communication is the ability to swiftly address critical situations and emergencies. In urgent situations, healthcare organizations must have established protocols and communication channels in place to ensure rapid and effective dissemination of information. This includes timely notifications to relevant stakeholders, such as emergency response teams, healthcare providers, and patients. By implementing emergency communication plans, healthcare organizations can mitigate risks, minimize confusion, and facilitate swift decision-making during critical incidents.

It is worth noting that while timeliness is crucial, the quality and accuracy of the information communicated are equally important. Healthcare organizations should prioritize ensuring that the messages they convey are clear, concise, and based on reliable and up-to-date information [CITATION]. Miscommunication or dissemination of incorrect information can have severe consequences, including compromised patient safety, erosion of trust, and reputational damage.

To further enhance on-time communication, healthcare organizations can leverage technological advancements such as automated appointment reminders and patient portals. Automated appointment reminders can be sent via SMS, email, or phone calls, providing patients with timely notifications about their upcoming appointments. This reduces the likelihood of missed appointments and helps healthcare providers optimize their scheduling and resource allocation. [A study](#) by the National Library of Medicine in the UK demonstrated that it reduced the "did not attend" rates by ~3%. Patient portals, on the other hand, allow patients to access their health information, test results, and communicate securely with their healthcare providers at their convenience, promoting timely engagement and efficient communication. [Preliminary research](#) by the National Library of Medicine also found that "patient portals have demonstrated benefit by enabling the discovery of medical errors, improving adherence to medications, and providing patient-provider communication, etc."

## Enhancing patient engagement and satisfaction with personalization



Personalization is a key aspect of effective healthcare communication strategies. Given the diverse range of clients and demographics that healthcare organizations serve, it is essential to accommodate different communication preferences. Some individuals may prefer traditional phone calls for appointment reminders, while others may find email or text messages more convenient and accessible. By allowing customers to personalize their communication channels, healthcare organizations can enhance engagement and interact with their clients in the most convenient and preferred ways.

To facilitate personalized communication, healthcare organizations should provide various options for clients to interact with their organization. This could include offering the choice between text messages, emails, phone calls, or even utilizing a dedicated mobile application. By offering multiple channels, healthcare organizations acknowledge and respect the diverse preferences of their clients, promoting better communication and engagement.

An excellent example of personalization in healthcare is demonstrated by [Allergan](#), a leading pharmaceutical company that leveraged Twilio's platform to enhance their communication efforts. By implementing personalized communication channels, Allergan allowed healthcare providers to tailor their messages to individual patients' preferences, ensuring that patients received information via the digital channel that worked best for them. This personalized approach not only enhanced convenience but also improved patient engagement and satisfaction.





### Challenge

Allergan had a B2B2C business model, selling its products to healthcare providers who then re-sold them to end consumers. As a result, Allergan invested the vast majority of its marketing focus on the doctors reselling its products, and much less energy on end consumers. Facing more competition, Allergan knew it needed to build better direct relationships with consumers to continue growing.

### Solution

Account Notifications, SMS Sales, SMS Support, Text Marketing

### Founded

1983

### Founded

Dublin, Ireland

### Related products

Programmable Messaging  
Twilio Segment

### Related products

Programmable Messaging  
Twilio Segment

### The results

**4.9** Allē App Store rating  
**400M** yearly sales driven  
**3M+** Allē loyalty users

It is crucial not to force clients into a single communication stream. For instance, requiring patients to call the organization to make an appointment may deter some individuals, especially those experiencing anxiety or discomfort. To address this, healthcare organizations should implement alternative methods such as allowing patients to text in their appointment requests or providing an online scheduling portal. By offering convenient and accessible options, healthcare organizations can remove barriers to care and make the appointment process more efficient for clients.

In addition to appointment scheduling, personalized communication channels can also extend to other aspects of healthcare services. For instance, some patients may prefer to receive test results or follow-up instructions via secure email, while others may opt for accessing this information through a patient portal. By providing a range of communication options, healthcare organizations cater to individual preferences, ensuring that patients receive information in the format that works best for them.

Implementing personalized communication channels not only enhances convenience but also improves patient engagement

and satisfaction. When clients have the ability to choose their preferred mode of communication, they feel empowered and respected as active participants in their healthcare journey. This personalized approach fosters stronger patient-provider relationships, which can lead to increased trust and improved healthcare outcomes.

It is important for healthcare organizations to assess the effectiveness and satisfaction of their personalized communication channels. Regular feedback from clients can provide valuable insights into their preferences and help identify areas for improvement. Surveys, focus groups, or feedback forms can be utilized to gather input from patients and adjust communication strategies accordingly.

Furthermore, ensuring data security and privacy is paramount when offering personalized communication channels. Healthcare organizations must adhere to regulatory standards such as HIPAA to protect sensitive patient information. Implementing robust security measures and utilizing encrypted platforms or secure messaging services can help safeguard patient privacy while enabling personalized communication.

## Simplify medical language



Effective communication in healthcare requires clear and accessible language, as medical jargon can be confusing and potentially harmful to patients. When patients are unable to understand the information provided, they may disregard important messages or resort to searching for answers on unreliable sources, potentially leading to misinformation or unnecessary anxiety. While medical information has become more widely available and tools and guides have been developed to help demystify complex medical language, the onus is still on the providers to ensure the information provided is easily understood.

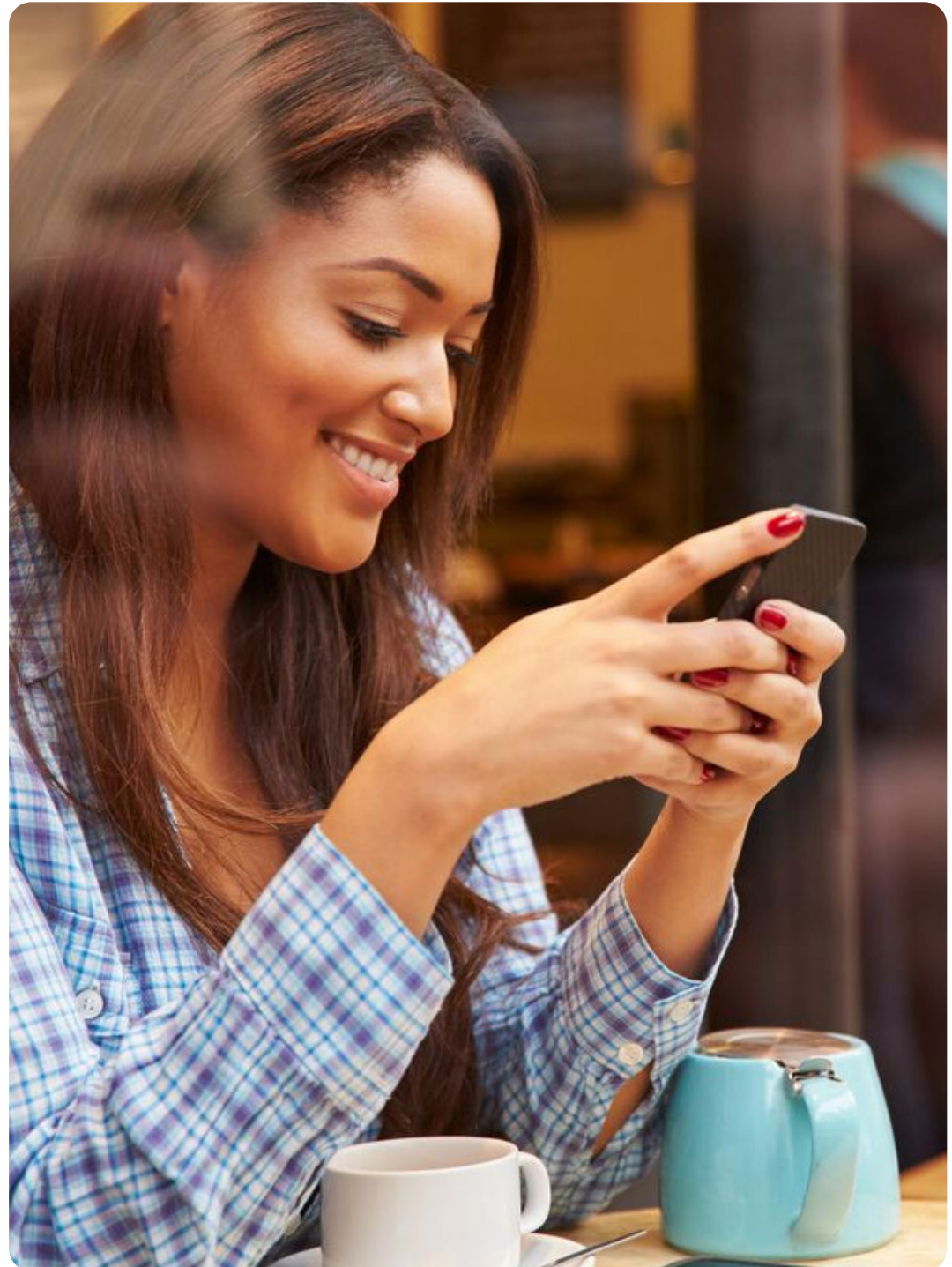
A study done by the National Library of Medicine in 2016 showed that medical comprehension is still a significant issue even with medical information widely available online:

*“Total [terminology] comprehension scores on the questionnaire were scored as the number of answers correct out of 11 questions. In the emergency department, the mean total score was 5.01, compared to 5.45 in orthopedic inpatients ( $p = .046$ ). Patients in both groups demonstrated poor understanding of medical terms (including fracture, ruptured tendon) and anatomical terms. In contrast, nonmedical terminology such as broken bone was better understood.”*

To begin the process of clarifying understanding, healthcare organizations can compile a common list of complex medical terms and their corresponding layman's explanations. This list can serve as a reference point for healthcare professionals when communicating with patients, helping them to convey information in a manner that is easily comprehensible.

In addition to simplifying terminology, healthcare organizations should also be mindful of acronyms and technical terms that might confuse patients. For instance, the acronym "NSAIDs" is commonly used to refer to "Nonsteroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs" such as ibuprofen or naproxen. Providing the common names of these medications alongside their technical terms can ensure patients fully grasp the information being conveyed.

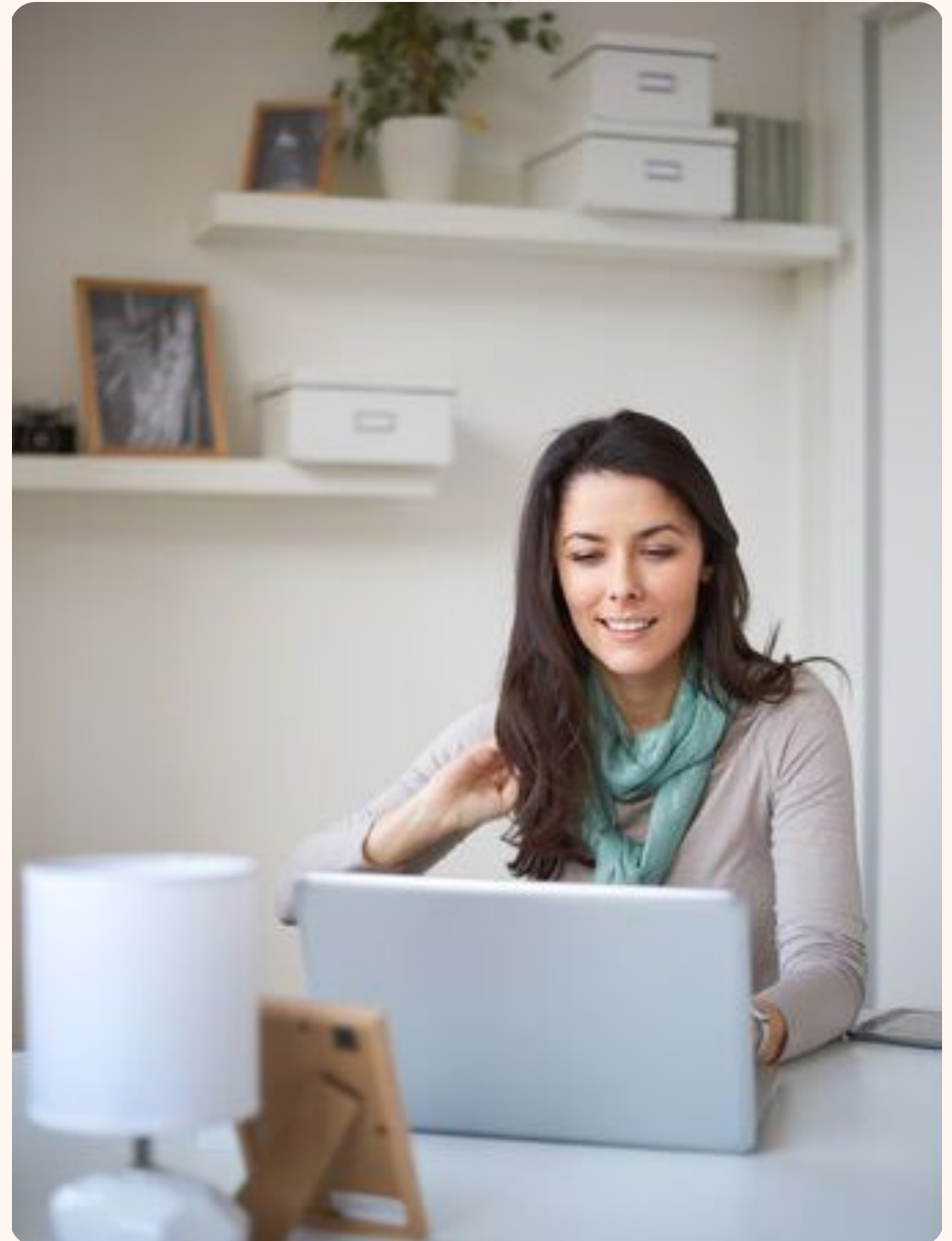
By incorporating plain language techniques and adopting patient-centric communication practices, healthcare organizations can bridge the communication gap and foster greater patient engagement. Clear and concise communication not only improves patient comprehension but also empowers patients to actively participate in their healthcare decisions, leading to better treatment adherence and outcomes.



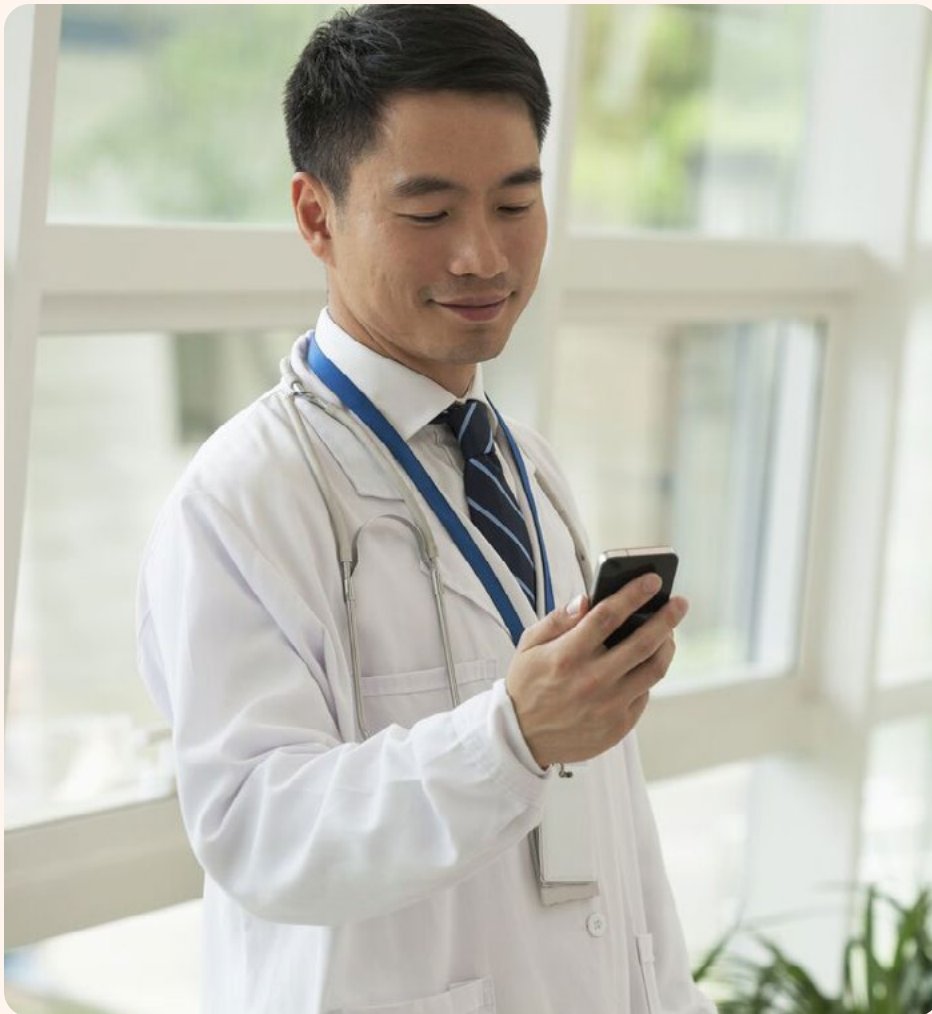


Replacing the term “**hypertension**” with “**high blood pressure**” allows patients to grasp the meaning without requiring prior medical knowledge. Similarly, substituting “**embolism**” with “**blood clot**,” “**edema**” with “**swelling**,” or “**analgesic**” with “**pain reliever**” simplifies the language and enhances patient understanding.

Furthermore, healthcare professionals should consider the use of anatomical terms that may be unfamiliar to patients. For example, replacing “**anterior**” with “**front**,” “**posterior**” with “**back**,” “**medial**” with “**inside**,” and “**lateral**” with “**outside**” helps patients better visualize and comprehend medical instructions or descriptions of their conditions.



## Create **feedback loops**



Listening to feedback is an integral part of continuous improvement in healthcare communication strategies. By actively seeking input from patients and clients, healthcare organizations can gain valuable insights that can help identify areas for enhancement in their communication approaches.

According to the Institute for Healthcare Communication, “extensive research has shown that no matter how knowledgeable a clinician might be, if he or she is not able to open good communication with the patient, he or she may be of no help.”

According to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, there are a few surefire ways to get quality feedback from your patients that goes beyond the standard survey.



## 1 Shadow patients

Shadowing patients involves having a staff member quietly observe a patient during their visit, offering valuable insights into your practice's flow and communication. By selecting a representative sample of patients in terms of age, gender, race/ethnicity/language, and health issues, you can gain a comprehensive understanding. Before appointments, inform selected patients of your goal to enhance their experience and ask for their consent. During the shadowing, ensure the staff member stays with the patient from check-in to departure, and afterward, gather feedback on what went well and what could be improved. Utilize Communication Observation Forms to record observations and assess communication quality. These insights can drive improvements in communication, practice flow, and overall patient satisfaction.



## 2 Do a walk through

To assess the practice's signage and physical environment, conduct a walk-through with an unfamiliar person accompanied by a staff member. Ensure the observer does not witness any private or confidential interactions. Consider involving a student from a local adult education program for the walk-through. Do research to find guidance on the questions to ask observers about their experience.



## 3 Patient portal audit

Gain valuable insights into the usability of your patient portal by observing patients as they interact with it. Request permission from several patients, especially those less experienced with computers, to observe their usage of the portal. Allow them to explore the portal freely and then assign a specific task, such as finding information or accessing lab results, while they describe their actions. This observation process will help identify areas for improvement in the portal's appearance, wording, organization, and navigation.

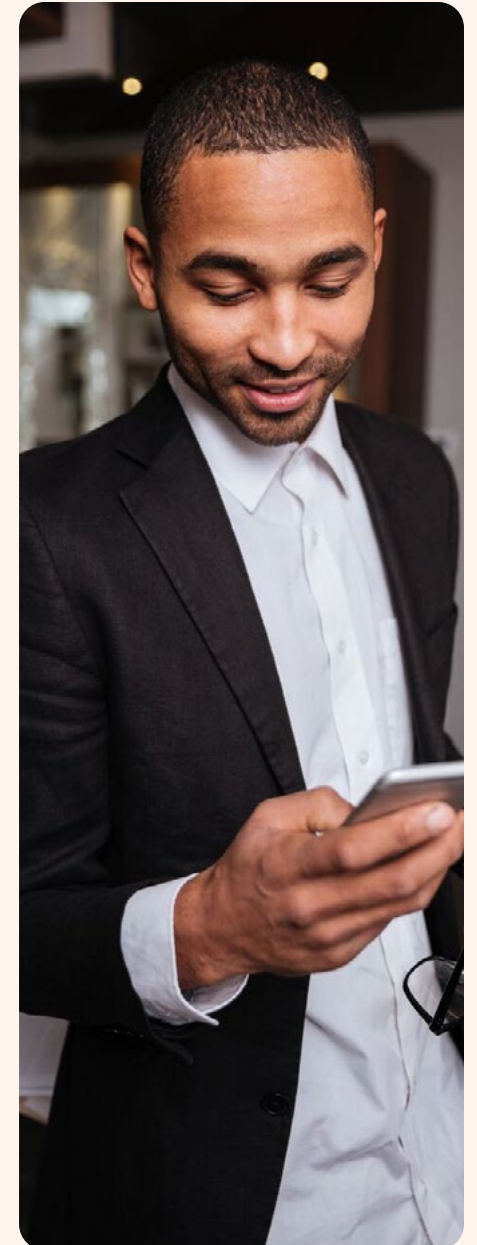


## 4 Written materials audit

Solicit patient feedback on the clarity of your written materials. Ask patients or their caregivers for their input while they wait or at the end of their visit. Remember to assess both externally sourced materials and those created by your practice.

However, it is essential to note that feedback should not be treated as a one-time event. Rather, it should be an ongoing process integrated into the core operations of healthcare organizations. Actively listening to feedback and continuously striving for improvement should be embedded within the organizational culture. Regularly soliciting and analyzing feedback allows organizations to adapt to evolving patient needs, address emerging challenges, and optimize their communication strategies accordingly.

To ensure the effectiveness of the feedback loop, healthcare organizations should establish clear communication channels and processes for capturing and addressing patient concerns or suggestions. This may involve designating staff members or specific departments responsible for managing feedback and taking appropriate action.



## Safeguarding data privacy and protected health information



Protecting sensitive data and maintaining the confidentiality of patients' protected health information (PHI) are paramount in healthcare communication. Utilizing HIPAA-compliant technology ensures that both your organization and your clients' data remain secure and in compliance with regulatory requirements. Compliance with HIPAA regulations is essential for healthcare organizations to prevent data breaches and protect patient privacy when utilizing communication tools, whether it's through phone conversations or online platforms. By selecting HIPAA-eligible products and services, healthcare organizations can undergo rigorous assessments and meet necessary requirements to safeguard PHI and maintain the privacy and integrity of healthcare communications.

Implementing HIPAA-compliant communication technology not only safeguards sensitive data but also instills confidence in patients that their personal information is being handled with the utmost care and security. This is exemplified in the case study of [Twilio's collaboration with Zocdoc](#) to create a video appointment solution. The solution demonstrates how innovative HIPAA-compliant technology can revolutionize healthcare communication, ensuring secure and convenient virtual appointments.





By leveraging such solutions, healthcare organizations can enhance patient trust, streamline processes, and deliver high-quality care while maintaining strict compliance with HIPAA regulations. Ongoing monitoring, risk assessments, regular updates, and staff training on HIPAA regulations are vital to maintaining compliance and minimizing the risk of accidental disclosures and breaches. Healthcare organizations should regularly review their technology infrastructure and communication processes, leveraging HIPAA-compliant solutions, to identify vulnerabilities and ensure the highest level of security and patient privacy.

**HIPAA-compliant technology can revolutionize healthcare communication, ensuring secure and convenient virtual appointments.**

## Leveraging chatbots for enhanced healthcare communication



Expanding chatbot capabilities in healthcare communication brings numerous benefits to both healthcare organizations and patients, optimizing efficiency and enhancing the overall experience. As recently as 2020, physicians and healthcare providers theorized about the potential and viability of using AI-fueled chatbots. Today, we've seen advancing technology enable chatbots to perform various functions, such as scheduling appointments, handling payment inquiries, and providing information on prescription availability at nearby pharmacies. Chatbots allow healthcare organizations to streamline processes and offer patients quick and convenient access to essential services.

For instance, in a case study with Luma Health, Twilio worked with that team to develop chatbots that improved patient engagement and reduced administrative burden. These chatbots assisted patients in scheduling appointments, provided real-time updates, and allowed seamless communication between patients and healthcare providers, resulting in improved patient satisfaction.

In addition to appointment scheduling and payment inquiries, chatbots serve as valuable resources for patients seeking general information about healthcare organizations, including hours of operation, services provided, and location details. They can also offer preliminary information on common health concerns, helping patients assess symptoms and make informed decisions about seeking further medical assistance. Furthermore, chatbots have the potential to provide mental health support by offering resources,



suggesting coping strategies, and connecting patients with appropriate professionals or helplines.

Apart from assisting patients, chatbots play a crucial role in data collection and patient feedback. Through interactive conversations, chatbots gather relevant information, such as patient demographics, medical history, and feedback on services provided. This data can contribute to improved patient care, personalized experiences, and organizational enhancements. Moreover, chatbots can be utilized to set reminders for appointments, medication schedules, or important healthcare activities, helping patients stay organized and ensuring they don't miss critical tasks.

While chatbots offer significant advantages, it is important to maintain a balance with human interaction. In a study by the [Journal of Medical Internet Research](#), physicians stated that health care chatbots have potential risk associated with them. Self-diagnosis can lead to misunderstood diagnosis. That's why, in situations where personalized attention, complex problem-solving, or emotional support is required, chatbots should have the capability to transfer users to real-life agents or healthcare professionals. Training and customization of chatbots in healthcare involve incorporating medical knowledge, adhering to organizational policies, and considering ethical and legal implications. Regular updates based on patient interactions and feedback ensure that chatbots remain relevant, accurate, and useful in delivering quality healthcare services.

## Enhancing healthcare accessibility and convenience through remote patient care



Expanding healthcare services beyond traditional in-person consultations through remote patient care options offers significant accessibility and convenience advantages for patients. By utilizing video, chat, phone, and SMS channels, healthcare organizations can connect with patients irrespective of geographical limitations or individual circumstances, delivering timely care.

One compelling example of the benefits of remote patient care is the collaboration between Twilio and [Anytime Pediatrics](#). Anytime Pediatrics implemented Twilio's communication platform to provide virtual pediatric care, enabling parents to connect with healthcare providers through video consultations and secure messaging. This remote care solution has improved accessibility for families, allowing them to receive expert medical advice from the comfort of their homes, eliminating the need for unnecessary travel and reducing costs.



### **Solution**

Appointment Reminders, Arrival Alerts, Mobile Customer Care, SMS & Phone Surveys, SMS Support

### **Founded**

2016

### **Headquarters**

Nashville, Tenn.

### **Related products**

Programmable Messaging  
Email (Twilio SendGrid)  
Programmable Voice  
Programmable Video

### **The results**

**36%** reduction in incomplete visits  
**96%** patient satisfaction  
**100K+** telehealth visits supported

In addition to convenience, remote patient care facilitated by Twilio's platform has enhanced timely healthcare delivery. Parents can promptly connect with healthcare providers through chat or SMS to address their child's healthcare concerns, receive guidance, and obtain necessary prescriptions, saving them the effort and time of scheduling and attending in-person appointments. This optimized resource allocation enables healthcare providers to focus more on patients requiring in-person care while maintaining high-quality support for remote patients.

Furthermore, the remote patient care solution implemented by Anytime Pediatrics and Twilio has greatly improved continuity of care for children with chronic conditions. Healthcare

providers can regularly communicate with parents, monitor the child's progress, adjust treatment plans as needed, and ensure consistent support and guidance, all through secure and convenient remote channels. This ongoing remote care has resulted in better health management and improved outcomes for pediatric patients.

The success of the Anytime Pediatrics case study highlights how the adoption of remote patient care, powered by Twilio's communication platform, can revolutionize healthcare delivery. By leveraging video, chat, phone, and SMS channels, healthcare organizations can overcome geographical barriers, increase accessibility, and provide timely care, ultimately improving the patient experience and outcomes.

# Creating a culture of continuous improvement



By incorporating remote patient care into their healthcare offerings, organizations can expand their reach, provide more convenient care options, and enhance patient satisfaction and engagement. Embracing technology-driven solutions and leveraging remote communication channels empower both healthcare providers and patients to overcome geographical, logistical, and time constraints, ultimately improving healthcare accessibility, efficiency, and overall patient outcomes.

# **Supercharge your healthcare organization's communications with Twilio.org**



Unlock the potential of SMS, voice, chatbots, and WhatsApp to expand your organization's reach. Twilio.org, Twilio's social impact division, works with organizations ranging from nonprofits and NGOs, to universities, hospitals, and local governments. Twilio.org exists to bring the power of Twilio's Customer Engagement Platform to organizations advancing a social good - such as access to healthcare. Talk to a sales specialist today to find the perfect solution for scaling your healthcare organization's mission.



## Thanks for reading

If you would like to learn more about what Twilio technology do for your organization, please [contact the Twilio.org sales team](#) or give us a call at 844 814 4627.