

How patient engagement in health care can create Health care gaps and how appointment reminders can help prevent them

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Meta Description: Patient engagement in healthcare can lead to healthcare gaps. When patients miss needed appointments, this creates care gaps. Appointment reminders can help patients from missing needed treatment and care and prevent healthcare gaps from occurring.

Significant gaps in healthcare affect the quality of care that patients receive regularly. Care gaps occur when care is missed that a patient needs. Care gaps can happen for many reasons, and missed appointments with health care providers are one of them. Appointment reminders can help improve patient engagement in health care, preventing further complications from occurring. This article will explain what healthcare gaps are, how to identify them, and how to overcome these disparities.

What are health care gaps?

Health care gaps are considered discrepancies in the care provided to patients compared to the recommended best practices in health care. Gaps in care can occur in many different ways. Some ways include patient non-compliance who are at high risk, new diagnosis not being shared with other healthcare providers, not following treatment or prescription regimens, and not finding a care provider in the patient's area. Sometimes patients miss age based annual screening and vaccines or not have recommended medication added based on best evidence-based guidelines.

How to identify health care gaps

Organizations and healthcare providers need to recognize when health care gaps occur. This may be challenging for most organizations, so it is crucial to learn how to catch and prevent them. Many companies rely on carrier reports to identify that these health care gaps have occurred, but it does not help prevent them from happening. Health care gaps do not only affect patients, but it also drives up the cost of health care for companies. Forward thinking and preventing healthcare gaps will help benefit

both the patients and healthcare companies. Patient engagement is a huge key in preventing care gaps. Sending appointment reminders to the patients can help prevent missed appointments to avoid gaps in care. An appointment reminder can be a simple reminder call, text, email, or push notification through an app that will help ensure that patients get the proper care that they need.

Patient engagement in healthcare and how it can create health care gaps

Patient engagement in healthcare is typically not proactive. Appointments can be missed, cancelled, postponed, and when this happens, it creates health care gaps. Specific patient populations are at risk of missing appointments, regular check-ups, and wellness exams. These can occur when patients miss essential exams such as colonoscopy screenings, mammograms, and prostate checks. Patients who miss these preventative screenings can have colon cancer, breast cancer, prostate cancer, or more missed as a diagnosis when this happens. Even patients with a known chronic diagnosis can be noncompliant and miss recommended follow-ups, prescriptions, and screenings to prevent worsening of the disease and hospitalizations.

How appointment reminders can help prevent health care gaps

With technology advances today, there are several ways for patients to make an appointment with their doctor. Appointments can be made in person, on the phone, online, and through phone apps. Patients are busy everyday people, just like everyone else. Appointment reminders are essential, but sometimes patients miss their appointments due to various reasons. Patients may set reminders on their phones, put them in their electronic or physical calendar, and even post-it notes around their house. Many patients welcome appointment reminders from their doctors' offices. When an appointment goes missed, it has an opportunity to create a health care gap. The appointment could be for an existing condition or a missed opportunity for screening. These missed appointments can lead to health care gaps that can miss diagnosing ailments or miss treatments. Appointment reminders are a great way to prevent patients from missing their appointments. Appointment reminders can be made through call, text, email, and app push reminders. Patients may have different preferences on how they wish to be contacted and reminded of their healthcare appointment. Allowing the patient to choose one of many communication routes with the health care provider's office can prevent missed and cancelled appointments.

Examples of healthcare gaps in patient populations

There are several different types of health care gaps that can occur due to a missed appointment. Even something as simple as a yearly check-up, including a body mass index (BMI) check, can help screen for at-risk diseases and complications that can be caught early. Patients with diabetes are at risk for several complications, and missed appointments and screening may be detrimental to this at-risk group. Diabetic patients need to check their blood sugar regularly and go into office check-ups for a 90-day measure called Hemoglobin A1c. Hemoglobin A1c is a blood test that shows the 90-day average of blood sugar in the body. For diabetic patients, this test is performed at least once a year to track trends, and physicians may make medication changes and other diagnoses based on this test. If this annual lab is missed on this patient population, it creates a care gap that can lead the patient to develop further complications.

Another example is a patient population who has chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) or emphysema. This patient population typically sees a pulmonologist to perform a pulmonary function test (PFT). The PFT will help the doctor diagnose and monitor COPD and emphysema progression. If the patient misses their appointment for this test, they may miss needed treatment and medication to help them breathe better. Patients at risk that miss appointments can go without needed treatment leading to hospitalization and reversible disease progression. Appointment reminders can help prevent these at-risk populations from missing these important exams and treatments.

How to close health care gaps

Patient engagement in health care is important to identify to close healthcare gaps. Closing gaps in health care starts with knowing the data of patients who are likely to fall into these areas of disparities. Collecting data and analyzing the risk within a patient population will help identify who needs help. Once the patient population has been identified, it is important to educate providers and associated staff on how to improve adherence rates across the patient population. Allowing for effective patient engagement in healthcare will help close these healthcare gaps from occurring. Knowing the at-risk patient population for missed appointments and their communication preferences can help with how they engage in their care. Appointment reminders are a great way to help at-risk patient populations from missing essential appointments and screening to prevent care gaps from occurring.