



Creating a digitally enabled consumer-centric healthcare organization



By Mike Phillips, MD, Chief Clinical Outreach Services Officer, Intermountain Healthcare | Reprinted from Becker's Hospital Review, August 23, 2018

Healthcare has always been slow to recognize and adopt digital consumer trends. Our patients regularly hail cars, order everything from socks to Thai food, and send money to friends and loved ones, all from their cell phones. Yet healthcare providers still require paper forms, calls to schedule appointments, and in-person visits. While slow to change, there are indications that healthcare is ready to embrace technology that puts the consumer at the center of care delivery.

Goldman Sachs estimates that digitizing healthcare could save \$305 billion in healthcare costs, with up to \$200 billion coming from improved management of chronic diseases. A recent survey by American Well found a majority of patients using telehealth today would be willing to utilize video visits to manage chronic conditions. We believe telehealth yields a significant network effect, with significant benefits and awareness being developed as healthcare organizations adopt it. This, in turn, is leading to greater use of telehealth by consumers.

At Intermountain Healthcare, digital tools are central to our goal of high-quality, accessible and affordable healthcare. That's why we launched Connect Care Pro, a collection of provider-to-provider telehealth services that extend access to specialists into remote and critical access hospitals. As just one example, our critical care service has improved mortality rates while keeping higher acuity patients in their local facilities, closer to home and family support networks.

Intermountain Healthcare expanded our digitization initiative in 2016 to direct-to-consumer telehealth, called Connect Care. This consumer-centric program is vital to our overall population health strategy and serves as a bridge from volume to value. Since launch, we've had well over 60,000 people enroll, 40 percent of whom have had a Connect Care visit. I attribute this success to four things: research, marketing, integration and execution of a consumer-centric approach with a 4.9 out of 5-star rating. Our estimate is that each Connect Care visit has greater than a \$60 positive impact after all expenses are paid. That positive impact is driven by decreased utilization of ER and urgent care, new patients switching to Intermountain for their care, and direct charges for telehealth visits.

Are consumers aware of telehealth?

In 2015, before Connect Care launched, we embarked on a research initiative to better understand consumer awareness of telehealth, willingness to embrace the service, and the role the Intermountain brand could play in solidifying telehealth's presence in the consumer psyche. Through our research we found only 20 percent of people had heard of telehealth, and less than 10 percent had used it. Interestingly, the percentage of people who were likely to use telehealth increased significantly when the service was associated with Intermountain Healthcare.

Multi-phased marketing approach

Based on these findings, we developed a three-pronged marketing approach to build awareness, drive engagement and encourage utilization of video visits. The Intermountain marketing team deployed an integrated approach consisting of traditional, digital, in-person and internal marketing tactics. This approach highlighted the four key benefits consumers would find valuable in a digitized service —convenience, cost, quality, and continuity.

We began by marketing Connect Care to our own employees to test marketing strategies. After two months of testing, we expanded to our SelectHealth members and then to the general public. We found that the success of Intermountain Connect Care directly correlated to our marketing investment and initiatives.

Integrating digital health into the care delivery system

Like virtually every health system, Intermountain makes a significant investment in our EHR system, and our physicians actively capture visits in the medical record. For digital healthcare to be successful, it is essential that our telehealth service isn't siloed from the rest of the care delivery system. Any visit on the Connect Care platform is synced to our health system's EHR through a two-point integration that auto-registers patient visits in the EHR. This allows Intermountain providers to continue to document in the EHR and access patients' existing medical records. This integration is also beneficial in that it helps streamline the process and makes it more efficient for physicians to engage with the service.

Humanizing the digital experience with a consumer-centric approach

Ultimately, we are doing this to help people live the healthiest lives possible. For one mother, this meant delivering a high-risk baby in her local hospital, where her care team was supported by neonatologists hundreds of miles away. For another family, this meant their vacation wasn't interrupted by a trip to an urgent care center for a suspected case of pink eye. For far too long, healthcare has been complicated at best, inaccessible at worst. By implementing telehealth and other digital initiatives, we are committed to tearing down some of the barriers that stand between a patient and the care they need, when and where they need it.