

# Why Interactive Patient Engagement Should be At the Top of Every Hospital's New Normal

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



**LIFE AFTER  
COVID-19**

The COVID-19 global pandemic has changed the hospital experience in profound ways for patients, providers and loved ones. Experts say there is no going back, and many industry leaders see this as the pivotal moment for hospitals; an opportunity to apply lessons learned to make lasting improvements in the care experience.

## The Pandemic Experience

- **Patient Isolation, Boredom, Fear.** Patients are experiencing the reality of a no-visitation hospital stay. Hospital lockdowns impact all patients, from the mother who just delivered her first child to the recovering transplant patient and stroke victim and the most seriously ill COVID-19 patients.
- **Clinical Challenges.** Clinicians and ancillary department staff are delivering care and hospital services in an environment of unprecedented infection control protocols – while managing scarce personal protective equipment. Surges in critically ill patient admissions put added pressure on clinicians whose workloads already are overburdened. And the ability to quickly standup emergency facilities has been tested across the nation for many hospitals.
- **Family Separation, Anxiety.** Loved ones feel helpless as they are separated from their hospitalized family members. Often the sole communication lifeline between family and patient is the overtaxed nurse.

The harsh reality is that the pandemic has taught hospitals some poignant and painful lessons. Among them is the eye-opening recognition that interactive patient engagement is no longer a nice-to-have technology in hospitals. As we move to a new healthcare normal – limited or no visitation periods, intense infection control protocols and nimble activation of emergency facilities – interactive patient engagement solutions meet critical hospital needs.



## An Opportunity to Change

Even as the country begins to gradually reopen, the pandemic fight is far from over, say infectious disease experts. The Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy study, published in April 2020, notes three likely scenarios ahead. They range from continued peaks and valleys of infection, to a peak followed by a slow burn rate of infection.

"Whichever scenario the pandemic follows (assuming at least some level of ongoing mitigation measures), we must be prepared for at least another 18 to 24 months of significant COVID-19 activity, with hot spots popping up periodically in diverse geographic areas," the researchers note.

And even in a post-pandemic world, hospitals and patients can expect a new normal built on the lessons learned from COVID-19. Jefferson Health CEO Dr. Stephen Klasko calls COVID-19 the "nexus moment" that brings about a new normal in healthcare delivery.

"We need to recognize that this will happen again and use this as a very expensive lesson," he said in an April 2020 interview with HealthLeaders. "We have to be ready so it's not a surprise, and I think the goal will be that we're much more prepared for the next one. Shame on [providers] if it doesn't change."

Make no mistake. A consumer market shell-shocked by a before-unknown world of quarantine, shortages and healthcare delivery system limitations will demand change.

Dr. Klasko predicts consumers themselves – not insurers or regulators - will make their expectations clear for quality hospital care.

# The New Mandate for Interactive Patient Engagement

Patients admitted into one of the thousands of hospital rooms with interactive patient engagement platforms are at a distinct advantage over others, when it comes to their hospital experience. Never has that been more apparent than since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. An interactive patient engagement system puts people in greater control of their hospital experience and their health. Allen's interactive E3 Patient Engagement Solutions help hospitals increase efficiency, enhance patient outcomes, improve HCAHPS, and increase financial performance.

COVID-19 made it clear that interactive patient engagement technology is not just about patient room enhancement. In fact, as we navigate an ongoing pandemic and an eventual post-pandemic environment, the mandate for interactive patient engagement technology has never been clearer. Here are six mission-critical roles that interactive patient engagement platforms play in today's hospitals, learned through the COVID-19 experience.

## Lesson 1: Hospitals Must View Patients as Consumers

The hospital industry has been slow to recognize the influx of consumerism, and adapt to it. That is changing, according to Michael Dowling, CEO of Northwell Health and chair of the Institute for Healthcare Improvement. For hospitals, "The connection between healthcare and the consumer is behind. Healthcare in general has never been consumer-focused in the way it should," he said.

Hospitals can expect consumers to take a proactive role in driving the patient experience, largely as a result of COVID-19. What does that look like? Expect consumer demand for the three Cs: convenience, control and communication.

- **Consumers expect convenient access to informative health education.** They want convenient access to their health record and their care plan. They want them delivered in a patient-centric, user-friendly, one-touch, real-time, 24/7/365 accessible format.

- **They want to control their own experience while in the hospital.** That means giving patients in-bed access to adjust their own room temperature, raise or lower blinds, turn down the lighting, order a meal, ask for a chaplain visit or pet therapy, request immediate housekeeping services, drown out hallway noise with relaxing sounds...you name it. As much as possible, patients want a hospital experience that mimics their experiences outside the hospital. They want to control their environment, choose services



they want when they want them – without relying or waiting on others, in this case, busy nurses or ancillary staff.

- **And, patients want better communication about their care team, diagnosis, medications, discharge plan, health record and more.** They want it delivered digitally, just as other communications they receive. And they want it to be easy to access and re-access at any time, easy to use and easy to understand.



## Lesson 1: Hospitals Must View Patients as Consumers *Continued*

Northwell Health hospitals, like Northern Westchester Hospital and Phelps Memorial Hospital, recognized this consumer trend years ago and responded by implementing an Allen platform. As a result, they were ahead of other hospitals when COVID-19 hit their region. Through it, their patients can use the patient room smart TVs and bedside touchscreens to educate, entertain and provide comfort controls. Patients can even give immediate feedback on their experience through these same devices.

Interactive patient engagement solutions like Allen E3 give patients-as-consumers access to what they want, when they want it to create a hotel-like, consumer-driven hospital experience.

*Since deploying interactive patient engagement, Northern Westchester Hospital has notched impressive improvements in patient satisfaction HCAHPS scores:*

Nurse communication ratings: ↑ 8%

Medication communication ratings: ↑ 11%

Room quietness ratings: ↑ 15%

Staff responsiveness ratings: ↑ 12%

## Lesson 2: Patients Need Entertainment and Distraction



In the pre-COVID-19 era, a patient's day might be interrupted with family and friends dropping in for visits. In a quarantined facility with no visitors or distractions, a patient stay is lonely, isolated and may even be scary. An interactive solution like E3 patient platform can play a significantly positive role.

Just as they do at home, TV, movies and games help break the monotony. Entertaining content that brings laughter and a happier outlook stimulates healing, too. Johns Hopkins studies found that patients with a positive outlook are 13 percent less likely than negative people to have recurring health episodes. A University of Kansas study found that simply smiling reduces heart rate and blood pressure in stressful situations.

Equipped with interactive patient engagement capabilities, a hospital-grade smart TV is transformed from simply a television to an invaluable tool for clinical and operational improvement. A patient room smart TV may have been considered an expendable expense pre-COVID. Not so in the new healthcare normal. With integrated interactive capabilities, they provide valuable benefits for better outcomes and hospital financials.

A smart TV also enables other functionality that helps distract and entertain patients. For example, using an internet-connected TV enables patients to communicate with their family and the outside world. Music apps facilitate relaxation and rest. In-bed therapy and exercise, like online yoga, provide healthy activity options based on the patient's personal care and therapy plan. And all of that is at the patient's fingertips with zero need to get out of bed or call for assistance.

*“Patients with a positive outlook are 13 percent less likely than negative people to have recurring health episodes.”*

*– Johns Hopkins Medicine*

## Lesson 3: Communication Must Be Improved

Numerous studies have shown that poor communication is one of patients' biggest beefs with hospitals. Never has communication been more tested than during the initial COVID-19 outbreak. Hospitals without interactive systems struggled to keep patients informed of daily hospital updates, or even share their own personal care plan.

Patients want a care team that listens to them, and provides open, understandable communication. In an acute-care setting, nurses' workflows must be streamlined to allow time for more bedside communication based on each patient's needs.

Hospitals with interactive patient engagement systems, that include digital whiteboards, have a distinct communications advantage. Digital whiteboard automated communication capabilities are invaluable in



***“Not keeping whiteboards updated” and “Lack of clear communication” rank #5 and #6 among hospital patients’ top complaints.***

– Becker’s Healthcare  
10 Most Common Complaints

a COVID-like environment. As part of today's hospital smart room, an Allen E3 platform pulls patient data directly from the EMR where it can be updated on the patient room TV digital whiteboard continually and seamlessly. The hospital digital whiteboard keeps patients updated without the need for a nurse or aide to use personal protective equipment to physically enter the room, sanitize a board and write an update.

Hospital digital whiteboards provide a medium for staff to display pertinent information and updates to communicate more effectively. Digital whiteboards can reduce the risk of medical errors by visually displaying patient medication schedules, discharge information and pain scores. Patients can also quickly reference staff names so they can address any questions or concerns promptly. Ultimately, hospital digital whiteboards can lead to improved patient communication, higher patient engagement and increased HCAHPS scores.

## Lesson 4: Patients Expect to Play an Active Role in their Care

Patients want to understand everything about their hospital stay – why they are there, what's being done toward their recovery, how long before they go home, and what they can do to avoid a return stay.

By definition, patient-centered care is about empowering the patient to play an active role in their care. But how do they do that without easy access to information? The fact is the hospital staff have the EMR as their platform, but what does the patient have for an interface to that massive hospital enterprise? Hospitals that truly

subscribe to the patient-centered care model know that patients need a health information platform, too.

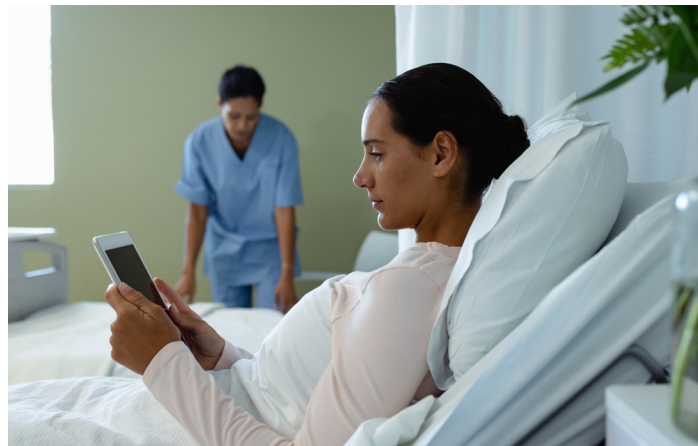
Nurses who use Allen's E3 digital interactive patient engagement platform for patient education teach-back are achieving significantly higher nurse communication scores. With E3, nurses assign health education videos based on the patient's diagnosis. Patients can view and review them at any time. When rounding, the nurse can use bedside time to reinforce the information, address questions and ensure the patient fully understands the information. Those are key components of teach-back.

## Lesson 4: Patients Expect to Play an Active Role in their Care *Continued*

*Collectively, **Allen's customers have seen nurse communication ratings improve 5.41%** from the outset of HCAHPS reporting in 2012 to 2018. Nationally, hospitals only improved by 2.56%.*

Without ever leaving the patient bed, the patient can view test results and personal health information, read medication summaries, view education videos on their condition and care, and go through their discharge plan and checklist on the TV, bedside touchscreen or tablet.

Putting all of that information directly in their hands addresses the things that patients say are most important to creating a better experience. It also gives the nurse more time at the bedside to answer questions and provide that personal communication that patients say is so important to them.



*Studies have shown that 40-80% of the medical information patients are told during office visits is forgotten immediately, and nearly half of the information retained is incorrect.*

*– The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ)*

## Lesson 5: Hospitals Must Reduce Unnecessary Staff Interruptions



In an environment in which the patient has very little control over the situation, even small steps to give control can be a positive. Technology that lets the patient control room temperature, order a snack or request an extra blanket empowers the patient. As a result of COVID-19, room cleanliness will be among patients' utmost concerns. An interactive system lets the patient request immediate housekeeping services to alleviate any concerns and ensure trust in their environment. Using Allen E3 eliminates the need for an aide, nurse or ancillary staff to waste valuable PPE to enter the patient room for routine, non-clinical tasks. It also ensures that short-staffed nursing teams can focus on urgent clinical care where they are most needed.

*Allen's interactive menus saved one hospital 8,700 staff hours annually, eliminated the need to use PPE to manually take meal orders, and contributed to an HCAHPS rating 14% higher than benchmarks.*



## Lesson 6: Hospitals Need Technology to Quickly Standup Emergency Facilities

When emergencies like a pandemic arise, hospitals face tremendous demands on their facilities, staffs and infrastructure. As they moved rapidly to deploy temporary and overflow facilities, existing nurse call capabilities proved inadequate to handle the patient and nurse load on those systems. As many facilities learned through COVID-19, often those temporary units lack the technological infrastructure of a brick-and-mortar facility for even routine tools like nurse call systems. To stand up a temporary unit quickly, you need a nimble, creative technology solution.

### *Existing nurse call capabilities often are inadequate to handle emergency, temporary units.*

As part of a one-stop interactive solution, Allen can deploy an in-a-box wireless nurse call system in less than two hours. Scalable to an unlimited number of beds and nurses, the UL-256 certified solution uses proprietary wireless access points, powered by Zigbee, to ensure there is no impact on the hospital's own WiFi network.



Patient nurse call pendants connect to a desk console, and enable two-way communication through a mobile app on the nurse's personal phone. The solution is packaged in a compact case the size of carry-on luggage for easy transport to the popup site. All programming is handled remotely, enabling onsite staff to stay focused on patient care.

## Are You Ready for the New Normal?

Before the COVID-19 outbreak in the US, about 17 percent of hospitals incorporated digital tools to a great extent in their patient experience efforts. That's according to the Beryl Institute's 2019 State of Patient Engagement report.

With the lessons learned from the pandemic – and the likelihood of ongoing pandemic outbreaks – the mandate for leveraging automated digital interactive technology has arrived. The consumer patient's expectations for convenience, control and communication will continue to escalate. Interactive patient engagement solutions delivered over the smart TV turn the new normal into the "better than normal" hospital experience. Hospitals that apply these lessons now will be better prepared for the new normal that lies ahead.



### About Allen Technologies

Allen Technologies is a Sentic Company that transforms the way hospitals engage, educate and empower patients. Allen's E3 patient engagement platform, delivered via television, tablet and bedside monitor, is a patient-centric portal for patient education, in-room comfort control, and entertainment. Visit [www.engagewithallen.com](http://www.engagewithallen.com).