

# Proactive patient engagement.

Are providers doing enough?

## Closing the care gap

Driving better outcomes with proactive patient engagement.

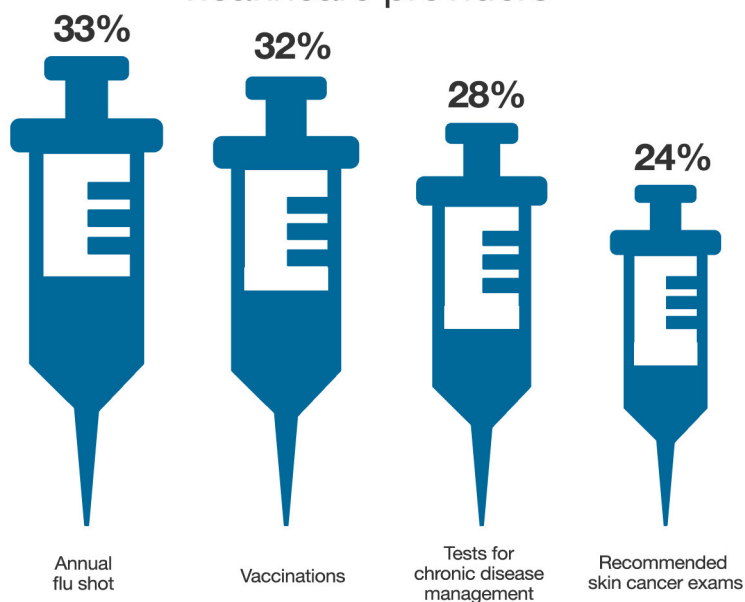
With the rise of calorie-counting smartphone apps and activity trackers like Fitbit and Nike's Fuelband, Americans are clearly taking a more proactive interest in their health. And beyond treating them when they're sick, they expect their healthcare providers to actively help them stay healthy. However, new research shows that healthcare organizations aren't yet achieving the proactive engagement their patients want.

In fact, the grades are in and consumers clearly see room for improvement. When it comes to patient experience, healthcare providers are only averaging a C+. The majority of patients are giving healthcare providers a B (39 percent) or C (27 percent) grade for patient satisfaction and the patient experience. In other words, there is a "gap in care" when it comes to engaging healthcare consumers.

To probe this issue more deeply, Nuance Communications recently commissioned a survey of 1,000 American patients. The following findings reveal opportunities for healthcare providers who want to increase their level of patient engagement and improve the overall health of the populations they serve – driving higher reimbursements and building stronger patient loyalty.

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### Top desired reminders from doctors and healthcare providers



**Prevention is the best medicine**

Frequent, proactive patient outreach will become essential as emphasis shifts from transactional to holistic care and reimbursement structures evolve to tie quality of care to financial reward.

And patients will respond positively – 65 percent of healthcare consumers are interested in receiving reminders from their doctors or healthcare providers for procedures such as annual flu shots, vaccinations, recommended tests for screenings associated with chronic disease, etc. But today providers are not delivering – less than half (48 percent) of patients say providers make reminder calls to them before appointments, tests and shots. Additionally, only 40 percent of patients say that their doctor is involved in their day-to-day health and wellness.

Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of patients say their doctor has never checked on them when they weren't sick in order to help them stay healthy. While this is an improvement over 2012 survey results (70 percent), the vast majority of patients are not hearing from providers in sickness and in health.

**Digital communications on the rise**

Patients further report that they view digital outreach from their doctors as a way to prevent health problems. More than half of consumers (53 percent) believe communication over text, email or via a smartphone app could have helped them avoid a health problem in the past. And among the people who want help the most – those enrolled in health and wellness programs – this number is even higher, with 84 percent indicating reminders or supportive messages could have helped them avoid a health problem.

The desire for increased patient engagement is a positive development for providers. With preventive measures a top priority for financial incentive programs and performance measures alike, the pressure is on to find ways to effectively motivate patients to take action. The research indicates reminders are welcome and, using cost-effective digital channels, could successfully drive deeper patient activation.

From the standpoint of patient satisfaction, the disparity between expected outreach should not be ignored. The Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS) and other surveys are assessing the satisfaction of provider patient bases and a failure to meet consumer expectations can lead to weak results – not to mention low patient retention.

**Increase in patient communications****53%** E-Mail**50%** Smartphone  
Push Notifications**29%** Texting

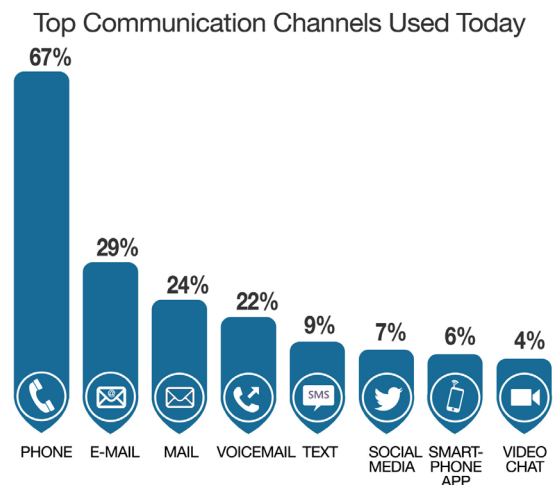
### A prescription for personalized communications

While providers may be falling short on proactive reminders for preventive measures, they have improved in their overall patient outreach. They are communicating across a broader number of channels than last year, with significant increases in the use of digital channels. In fact, since August 2012, email communications with patients have increased by 53 percent, texting by 29 percent and smartphone push notifications have grown by 50 percent.

But, are they reaching the right people in the right way? Optimal care is defined as the right care, at the right time, in the right setting. This mantra holds true for optimal patient engagement – it should be the right message, at the right time, via the right “channel.” Effective outreach means interacting with patients on the communication channel patients prefer. When establishing requirements for identifying patients for preventative/follow-up care, Meaningful Use Stage 2 specifically calls out that providers should “send these patients the reminder, per patient preference.”

The research findings show that communicating by preferred channel remains an area of growth for providers. For example, 47 percent of patients say they prefer emails from their providers, but only 29 percent of survey respondents are receiving them. Adoption of newer digital channels is another opportunity area for providers. While 17 percent of consumers want text messages, only nine percent are currently receiving them from their doctor or provider. Encouragingly, healthcare providers are sending more text messages to millennials – those born between 1980 and the early 2000s – but the gap between what these patients want and what they get is still substantial. For this demographic, 30 percent prefer text messages but only 18 percent say their provider has communicated with them via text.

Again, not engaging patients through the channel they prefer is likely to reduce effectiveness. Not only do patients exhibit preferences by age, but also by gender, geography, race and income subsets. For example, when it comes to communications from providers, 70 percent more non-white patients prefer texting than white patients. If your organization is looking to boost population specific outcomes, taking into account demographic specific preferences will help you design a more effective outreach strategy.



**Amnesia in the digital age:  
why reminders reign supreme**

Despite the healthcare industry's increased emphasis on offering preventive care and total population health programs, the research indicates patients are not yet taking full advantage of screenings and appointments. More than half (56 percent) report they only go to the doctor once a year for preventive procedures, such as vaccinations or a skin cancer screening.

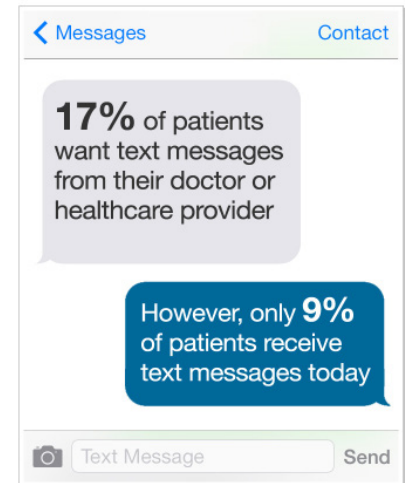
Why? Because they forget. When asked, 45 percent of patients admit to forgetting to schedule a preventive or wellness appointment in the past 12 months. Among millennials the rate is even higher – 58 percent forget to schedule this type of appointment.

Ironically, those enrolled in health and wellness programs are the most forgetful when it comes to scheduling preventive or wellness appointments. Seventy-eight percent of the patients in this group have forgotten to schedule an appointment in the past 12 months until they received a reminder.

This shows an increasing need for providers to proactively remind patients about important preventive and wellness services. However, only 25 percent of patients today say they've ever received a text message or email reminder for an upcoming appointment. Further, less than one in five have received a text or email reminder for common screenings, tests, shots or other proactive health measures.

When they do remember, most patients are covering just the basics. When asked what they proactively do without a reminder, only 45 percent of patients say they get an annual flu shot and less than one-third (30 percent) get vaccinations. And, these were the two activities that patients completed most often. Healthcare providers still have a long road to travel in getting patients to go beyond flu shots and vaccinations if they hope to keep up with proliferating accountable care and quality programs.

The bottom line: The road to illness is paved with your patient's good intentions. To help them stay healthy and to satisfy key quality measures, providers will need to do more than make services available. Success will involve proactive outreach – on channels your patients pay attention to – and easy-to-use self-service solutions that are available whenever patients are ready to engage.



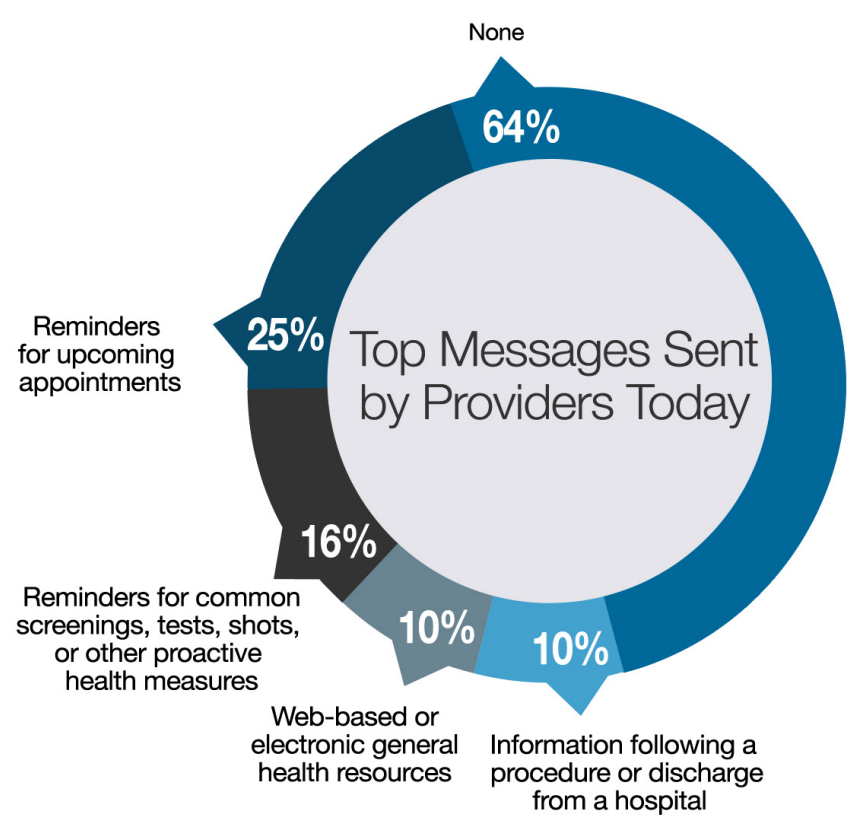
**Checking in for a check up**

Patients are also open to leveraging digital channels for a two-way exchange of information. Beyond receiving proactive education and reminders, patients are open to providing key health measurement data, such as height, weight or blood pressure. In fact, more than two-thirds (67 percent) say they would likely submit key health measurements through a smartphone app, text, email, phone or web survey.

However, despite this openness to submit measurements electronically, less than one-quarter (23 percent) of patients said their healthcare provider has ever asked them to do so.

This gap reveals another key opportunity for providers. Submission of personal data is essential to identifying adherence issues and documenting population health improvement. Typically, highly trained nursing, care management or coaching staff manually survey patients to collect the needed data.

The possibility of leveraging automated surveys and popular digital channels to collect biometric and other assessment data will allow chronic disease and wellness programs to more easily and cost-effectively scale to serve broader populations. This presents a significant opportunity for providers— especially those with accountable care agreements – as they evolve into population health managers.

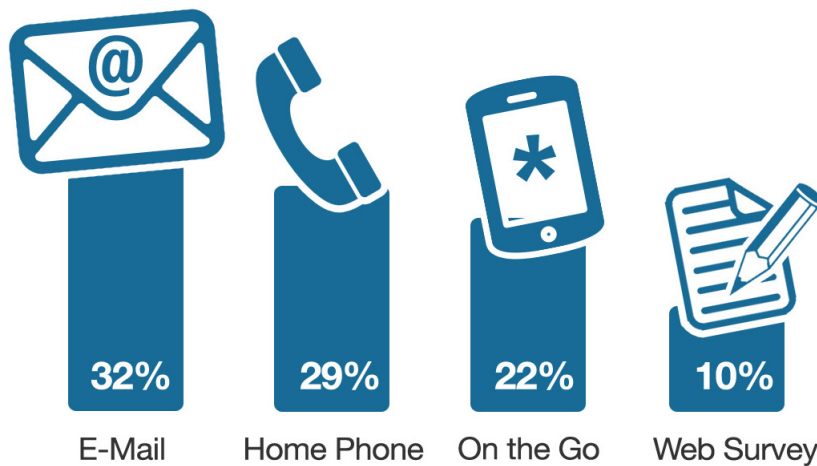


**Beyond the doctor's office**

As consumers become more dependent on digital channels, push notifications and alerts in their work and social lives, we see the same dependence taking hold when it comes to their health. Because consumers are so accustomed to frequent updates from the majority of the businesses they interact with, patients now expect their doctor or healthcare provider to remind and prompt them to take care of their health.

If healthcare providers fail to proactively engage their patients on the channels they prefer, they face the challenges of rising costs, low satisfaction ratings and patient turnover. However, embracing advances in automated outreach and self-service solutions has the potential to yield numerous benefits – from happier, healthier patients to significant financial reward.

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**Preferred Channels for Sending Health Measurement Data**

**Notes on methodology**

This national survey was conducted by Wakefield Research, an independent market research firm on behalf of Nuance Communications, from October 14 to October 21, 2013. The 1,000 respondents included American consumers over the age of 18 years old.

Results of any sample are subject to sampling variation. The magnitude of the variation is measurable and is affected by the number of interviews and the level of the percentages expressing the results. For the interviews conducted in this particular study, the chances are 95 in 100 that a survey result does not vary, plus or minus, by more than 3.1 percentage points from the result that would be obtained if interviews had been conducted with all persons in the universe represented by the sample.

**About proactive engagement**

Nuance works with the nation's leading brands, improving the reach and effectiveness of their customer service and collections campaigns. We deliver results by blending the scalability and efficiency of cloud-based automation with sophisticated personalization based on known preferences and previous response patterns. Orchestrating the use of channels most preferred by consumers – voice, text, email, mobile application and live agent– further ensures cost-effective results. Fortune 500 companies who build loyalty based on their service, trust Nuance to proactively engage one in five Americans each year with the right information at the right time. Follow us on Twitter: @NuanceEnt

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