



How Cord Cutting Will Transform Healthcare

Health systems are making the leap from manual outreach to SMS-based, automated patient engagement.

As Consumer Cut the Cord, Healthcare Follows Their Lead

In the world of entertainment, “cord-cutting” refers to the pattern of viewers cancelling their subscriptions to cable and satellite TV in response to new options available from agile service providers like Netflix and Hulu. This trend shows no sign of slowing, as research shows more than one-third of US households will “cut the cord” by 2024.¹ The benefits of this approach are numerous, with the largest by far being cost savings. However, consumers are increasingly motivated by greater flexibility, choice, and a better overall experience.

While new technologies often quickly shape behavior and drive change in the consumer world, B2B adoption can be slower, especially within sectors like healthcare. Yet the lessons learned from consumers “cutting the cord” can easily be applied to this industry, especially among health systems that are tied to outmoded, costly, and manual options for patient outreach. Dedicated contact centers are simply making too many phone calls that patients *don’t want and don’t respond to*, leading to high costs and low engagement.

As a result, health systems are starting to cut the cord on the conventional approach. By moving to automated patient engagement, especially via SMS-based outreach, these organizations are benefitting from cost savings and higher patient response rates. Those adopting new patient engagement technologies report a better experience for *both* patients and staff members.

The Hidden Costs of Manual Engagement

Most conventional engagement approaches make little financial, clinical, or operational sense given the availability and promise of new technologies. For example, health systems may still be using paper-based post-operative instructions, direct mail for preventive care recalls, or manual calls to reschedule appointments with patients. These modalities are not only costly, but also inefficient and lead to a poor patient experience. When you consider the cost of staff time for manual calling, postcard mailings, and the fact that robocalls are increasingly ignored, it’s no wonder that health systems are looking for new ways to cut the cord on this type of outreach.² In fact, one study showed that 25.3 percent of annual hospital costs go toward administrative expenses, adding up to more than \$750 billion not linked to direct care.³

Fortunately, part of the solution to these challenges is *already* in the hands of consumers. In addition to reducing costs, studies of diabetic and post-op patients show that automated patient engagement and SMS-based outreach can significantly improve care, outcomes, and the patient experience.^{4,5} Other research demonstrates the value of SMS outreach in engaging patients in behavioral health interventions, noting that “*patients especially appreciated the asynchronous nature of text messaging.*”⁶

Now’s the right time to cut the cord on manual patient engagement.

Hospitals are struggling with profitability. Hospital earnings were down nearly 5% in 2020.⁷ Missed appointments are especially troubling, as 40% of patients reported forgoing care.⁸ Each of these open, unused time slots costs up to 60 minutes and \$200.⁹

Staff burnout is increasing. 93% of workers are experiencing stress, 77% report frustration, and 76% report exhaustion and burnout.¹⁰

Patients want SMS-based engagement. 97% of consumers text, including 92% of seniors.¹¹ 37% of consumers are texting more because of the pandemic.¹²


Cord Cutting Taps Into Trends to Address Health System Needs

Simply disseminating text-based communications is only the first step in a true cord-cutting approach, which also requires rethinking and transforming workflows via automation. Automation is already being used by many health systems today, mainly to streamline back-end processes related to operations. However, many are not taking advantage of a similar technology-enabled approach to digital patient engagement. Barriers to adoption include:

- **Concerns about perceived implementation burden from new systems**
- **Lack of awareness about the cost of manual outreach**
- **Persistent beliefs that patient engagement needs a “human” touch**
- **Perceptions that engagement platforms must utilize an API to exchange data**

The right approach to cord cutting can address these concerns and further leverage the key benefits described earlier. However, to maximize the patient communications workflow, healthcare entities should consider a communications platform that delivers beyond the typical, single-point solution for SMS-based reminders. **A fully automated patient engagement approach will drive asynchronous, closed loop communications, using a channel that patients prefer and one that enables response in real-time - even for scheduling.** This means a patient can receive and react to a health system communication, even when this response is exchanging data within the EHR. This is only possible with an EHR-embedded, end-to-end platform that fully automates simple and complex patient engagement workflows.

Other valuable customer engagement capabilities include self-service features that allow staff to easily set up digital engagement campaigns, customize messaging, and easily disseminate information to patients, all without help desk tickets. To reach patients in the right channel at the right time with meaningful messaging, an automated patient engagement platform must also include multi-language capabilities and enable omni-channel outreach. In addition, natural interactions via chatbots help mimic human conversation while delivering timely responses. The dialogue delivers the “human touch” required for maximum engagement. Together, these capabilities enhance the patient experience within contact centers, increasing visit volumes and reducing manual outreach costs.



One recent example highlights the value of this cord cutting approach. Howard University was able to generate significant savings from adopting an automated engagement system, achieving a savings of \$110,880 annual FTE costs by eliminating manual phone outreach. According to the organization's patient outreach administrator, ***“The cost-savings were immediate, and the no-show rate was quickly cut in half.”***

How Health Systems Can Get Started

According to one recent Gartner study that examined the shift to artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots, "it's essential to understand which processes make the most sense to automate and which specific business problems the organization is trying to solve via this automation."¹³

Key to this process is finding a solution that embeds directly into the organization's existing EHR. While many platforms claim to be "integrated," this superficial EHR interaction still requires data sharing. This means manual outreach will still be necessary for certain activities, like scheduling, that require real-time, closed-loop activity within the EHR.

To begin cutting the cord, decision makers should examine 1) which activities between staff and patients are being completed through manual engagement and 2) whether cost or lack of resources prevents the organization from implementing patient outreach at scale. The answers will help health systems identify high-value and high-impact workflows that can be seamlessly transitioned from manual dependency to automated engagement.

Next, decision makers must identify digital engagement platforms that will automate these high-value workflows, and can assist in broader workflow opportunities as needs evolve. Workflows include everything from referral management to post-operative instructions, appointment management and closing care gaps. Key to this process is finding a solution that embeds directly into the organization's existing EHR. While many platforms claim to be "integrated," this superficial EHR interaction still requires data sharing. This means manual outreach will still be necessary for certain activities, like scheduling, that require real-time, closed-loop activity within the EHR. Conversely, an EHR-embedded patient engagement platform writes directly within the EHR, streamlining workflows and eliminating the need for manual intervention.

Take the Next Step

Transforming your digital engagement capabilities will help your healthcare organization more effectively connect with patients. An EHR-embedded platform makes it easy to deliver automated SMS messages that educate, increase recall and response rates, decrease no-shows, improve continuity of care, and reduce the associated staffing and administrative burden of conventional patient outreach. Look for an automated patient communication platform that delivers in these primary areas:

Choose a platform that will embed within your EHR.

This type of platform goes beyond integration and "writes" within the EHR so there is no need for manual follow-up or data sharing.

Look for a platform with capabilities beyond simple messaging.

A robust, automated, digital communications platform will provide closed-loop, SMS scheduling, broadcast messaging, chat, and more.

Discover how Intrado HouseCalls Pro can help you cut the cord on costly, inefficient patient communication. Implementing automated patient engagement will increase patient volume, reduce operational burden, and delight patients along the way. Call (877) 269-2904 or [contact](#) us to get started.

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