



Electronic engagement

GI centers should leverage technology to improve patient recall. By Brandon Daniell

➤ Communication with patients is directly linked to top-line revenue growth at GI practices and surgery centers. Consider how an answer of “no” to any of the following questions would impact revenue: Did the patient show up for a scheduled appointment or procedure? Did the patient notify about their intent to cancel far enough in advance to permit scheduling of another patient? If the patient showed up for an appointment as scheduled, did they comply with prep instructions? Now, consider how revenue would be increasingly impacted as more patients come up short concerning these questions.

For decades, phone calls and letters have served as the major form of communication in the GI space. If patient engagement levels were less than desired, the solution has typically been to make more phone calls and send more letters.

However, these options are time-consuming, expensive and often ineffective. Time spent making multiple calls, leaving a voicemail or printing and mailing a letter is time staff could have spent doing something else. Letters, in particular, are sent with the hope that patients receive and then actually open, read and respond to them. While some organizations have turned to email to help with engagement, it also has its shortcomings. One study shows that the average U.S. worker’s inbox has nearly 200 unread or unopened emails at any given time.¹



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Making the Case for Two-Way Texting

Fortunately, as a growing number of providers are discovering, there is a means of communication that addresses many of the shortcomings associated with more traditional forms. Texting—and more

specifically two-way, HIPAA-compliant texting—presents a communication opportunity for GI practices and surgery centers to bolster their patient communication efforts and bottom line in the process.

Two-way texting enables information to be pushed to and pulled from patients, caregivers and healthcare facility staff. It is a proven method for not only engaging patients, but also enhancing outcomes, improving staff productivity and strengthening workflow.

Looking back at the questions we posed concerning top-line revenue in the GI space, texting has been demonstrated to reduce cancellations and no-shows, increase the likelihood of filling an open slot in the schedule and increase the recall of patients for screenings.

A Crisp Reception

Since 2017, some Physicians Endoscopy (PE) facilities have used two-way texting as a patient communication tool. Patients seen at these facilities have been very receptive to receiving text communications. As of January 2020, nearly 80% of these patients have provided a mobile number and were being reached via text messages, says TJ Berdzik, CFA, Senior Financial Analyst and Manager of Financial Analytics at PE.

“From a volume standpoint, the benefits from such effective pre-procedure communication are twofold,” Berdzik says. “First, patients sometimes forget their appointments. If a nudge via text reminds a patient to show up, the center has avoided a no-show cancellation. The second benefit is in cancellation timing. If a patient would have canceled anyway due to a conflict, an early nudge, such as one sent several days before their appointment, may motivate the patient to cancel.”

By using texting to improve earlier cancellation timing, there is an opportunity to backfill the now vacant appointment slot with a new patient. In PE’s experience, Berdzik adds, “We found that the data indicates both lower last-minute cancellations as well as an increase in earlier cancellations. Overall, through the use of

Tactical Texting

What makes text messaging such an effective communication platform for GI? Consider the following:

- ▶ The majority of patients have mobile phones² and use texting in their daily lives. American adults opt in to receive text messages from airlines, dentists, hair salons, credit card companies and many other businesses. By embracing two-way texting, GI practices and surgery centers are leveraging a channel already adopted and embraced by a majority of their patients.³
- ▶ Two-way texting does not require any special hardware, just existing computers in the facility and patients’ mobile phones.
- ▶ Two-way texting requires no behavior change from patients. They simply need to provide their mobile number and know how to open, read and, if necessary, respond to the texts they receive.
- ▶ Many adults prefer to receive and send a text instead of receiving or making a phone call.⁴
- ▶ Research indicates that 95% of text messages are read within three minutes of being sent⁵ and 98% of all text messages sent in the United States are read.⁶
- ▶ Given that nearly all mobile phones have access to the internet, texting is an easy way to notify, educate and provide support to patients. If a link is included in the text message, it is an easy way to steer patients to directions to a facility, instructions, educational resources, frequently asked questions and more.

effective pre-procedure texting, we’ve seen cancellations in the last 24–48 hours decline by as much as 5%, with an average of about 1%–2%. Net, this can contribute to higher room utilization, center revenue and profitability.”

Two-way texting is a communication resource that can be an immediate asset to any GI facility. By embracing the convenience, speed and ubiquity of two-way texting, GI practices and surgery centers can increase patient engagement, which is a benefit to patients, staff, gastroenterologists and the healthcare system as a whole. 



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