BECKER'S HEALTHCARE

TeleVox

THE PATIENT EXPERIENCE STARTS AT THE FRONT DOOR:

THE ROLE OF GENERATIVE AI

As healthcare organizations strive to improve patient experiences and outcomes, reduce operational costs and increase visit volumes, the adoption of generative AI continues to gain traction.

To learn more about how hospitals and health systems are leveraging generative AI, *Becker's Hospital Review* recently spoke with Vijay Verma, Vice President of Product at TeleVox.

Before implementing generative AI, healthcare organizations must identify their goals

Generative AI technology is an emerging and broad use of AI to generate new content that may include text, images or music. This exciting technology has potential to disrupt many verticals, including healthcare. That said, as hospitals and health systems consider how to deploy Generative AI, they should first evaluate what pressing business challenges they need to address.

"Rather than simply implementing technology for the sake of implementing technology, think about how Generative AI could be used in three areas — patient experience, care team efficiency and care guidance. These three categories have their own risks and benefits." Mr. Verma said.

The cost of poor customer service in healthcare is high and impacts individuals, families and society at large. When it comes to the patient experience, people demand smooth interactions at the digital front door of their healthcare providers. Patients base their expectations on experiences with consumer applications like Uber or DoorDash. They expect booking an appointment, paying a bill or managing a referral to be seamless and friction-free. If and when the patients don't get this frictionless experience, they choose to defer care and that adds up to poor health outcomes.

"The worst-case scenario is when patients change providers due to negative digital experiences. According to Accenture, 71 percent of patients look for ease of access when choosing healthcare providers and 78 percent have dropped providers over difficult experiences related to booking appointments, getting answers and using digital tools," Mr. Verma said.

Historically it has been an expensive affair to generate content and self-service options that work across different channels (web, voice and SMS). This is why we've had point solutions that work on one of the channels or provide specific options. GenAI removes this bottleneck and allows us to create multi-modal, multi-language experiences for our patients. This reduces cost of handling inbound and outbound interactions by answering patient questions in a personalized and conversational manner.

"Patients are impatient," Mr. Verma said. "They don't like to wait on hold for 15 minutes or wait for two days to get an answer to a question. At the same time, over three quarters of patients admit to ignoring or declining phone calls from healthcare providers because it was an unfamiliar phone number."

Several hurdles prevent hospitals and health systems from meeting patient expectations

The first is resources. Recruiting and retaining good customer service staff is a major challenge.

"It's not easy to replace customer service employees who are good at their jobs. It takes time and effort to train them to a level that is genuinely appreciated by patients," Mr. Verma said.

Burnout is another obstacle that gets in the way of positive patient experiences. High staff turnover is an issue for call center staff, as well as among clinicians like nurses and physicians. Automating the answers to patient questions can reduce staff burnout and allows healthcare staff to focus on more meaningful tasks.

While technology can help standardize customer service and alleviate the need for employee training, many healthcare providers are unfortunately using outdated tactics and technology.

"This applies not only to the call center for appointment booking, but also for patient engagement and outreach," Mr. Verma said. "It's time to apply technologies and best practices from other domains to healthcare."

In healthcare settings, Generative AI can improve the patient experience

Hospitals and health systems can apply Generative AI to tasks of varying complexity and scale. One example is automating notes. The complexity of this task is high, since progress notes have medical and legal impact. The scale of this task is also high, because every patient visit includes notes.

Generative AI can also help with patient-facing translators. This work is complex, as it could have a significant impact on care. However, it is low in scale, since not every patient needs this service.

Customer service represents a sweet spot of low-complexity, high-scale opportunity for GenAI. Every visit may result in upwards of 10 different interactions. The good news is that this is an area where technology can help today.

"An AI-powered knowledge base can address a wide range of patient questions and source answers from your website," Mr. Verma said. "Generative AI provides trustworthy, accurate answers in a conversational way based on your organization's existing content on a channel of patient's choice, whenever they need this information and however they need it."

Another benefit of an AI-powered knowledge base is that it doesn't require duplicate work for your staff. The marketing team doesn't have to create channel specific content and the technology team doesn't have to set up point solutions. "The use of generative AI enables this type of capability at scale for your institution, no matter how big or small you are," Mr. Verma said.

To improve patient satisfaction, hospitals and health systems must provide an omnichannel experience via SMS, web communications and voice. Historically, healthcare organizations have taken a siloed approach to building content for interactive voice response (IVR), web and SMS. Today, generative AI can standardize across communication channels.

"Generative AI creates content that is seamless across SMS, web and voice," Mr. Verma said. "That content is effective in each channel, making feature parity across channels possible. It's the responsibility of hospitals and health systems to incorporate this capability into the experiences they provide to patients."

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TeleVox tools are transforming the digital front door for healthcare

TeleVox believes that the patient experience starts at the front door. In response, the company recently introduced Iris, an AI-powered virtual assistant. Healthcare organizations can leverage Iris as a personalized, omnichannel, conversational virtual assistant that helps patients at every step of their care journeys. Iris improves patient access, enhances the patient experience, reduces operational costs and improves staff efficiency.

TeleVox provides an extensible platform of solutions that provide day-one value and are extensible to meet your unique needs. SmartSMS is a perfect example where a conversation that was used to remind a patient to complete their referral can be used by the patient to seek information or assistance without having to make a phone call or download an app.

"One-way, transactional notifications are not conducive for two-way conversational self-service. This encourages patient to make multiple outreaches or look for faster care elsewhere," Mr. Verma said. "TeleVox is transforming SMS into a smart channel that's persistent, actionable and conversational. It serves your institution's objectives of reaching customers at scale, while empowering patients to reach out for information and get the self-service they are looking for."

Addressing the customer experience on a broader scale and with reduced friction is critical for improving the patient experience and employee satisfaction, as well as the financial health of institutions.

"Your website, phone calls and SMS messages all represent front doors for your healthcare organization," Mr. Verma said. "TeleVox can help you provide consistent, top-notch experiences that patients expect."