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How to Get More Out of athenahealth with a Patient Engagement Tool

Introduction

Digital transformation in healthcare isn't just a catchphrase — it's now imperative for practices.

In fact, the most recent "[Future of Healthcare Report](#)" conducted by the HIMSS Trust Partnership revealed that roughly nine in 10 healthcare systems in the U.S. will be in some stage of digital transformation in the next five years. Of course, many providers these days are well on their way thanks to EHR systems that allow for better patient management and care coordination. But a quality EHR system alone may not be enough to keep patients engaged and drive operational efficiency.

There's no denying that EHRs such as athenahealth work hard for medical practices. They keep a digital record of a patient's medical history across providers and allow medical teams and health systems to easily access patient records, coordinate patient care, and keep relevant information centralized and synchronized.

But when you connect athenahealth with technology platforms that amplify your patient communication capabilities and streamline your workflows, it can work even harder on your behalf. Thanks to interoperable healthcare IT solutions, providers may be better able to meet the evolving needs of their patients, offer a higher quality of care, and even address crippling physician burnout and staff overwhelm.

A major player in the health IT space is the **patient engagement tool**, which has a variety of benefits, including:

- Helping to streamline patient communication

- Encouraging patients to be more proactive about their healthcare

- Boosting patient retention rates

When interfaced with your EHR and overall tech stack, a patient engagement platform can help your practice achieve these results.

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In this white paper, we'll take a deep dive into the modern medical practice tech stack so you can get more value out of your athenahealth–patient engagement integration.

90%
of medical practices saw costs rise faster than revenues in 2022
Source

1 The modern medical practice tech stack

In health IT, a "tech stack" simply refers to the technologies that a practice or other healthcare organization uses to run its day-to-day operations. What the tech stack looks like depends on a number of factors — practice size, specialty, care model, patient population, etc. — but its purpose is generally the same: to help streamline workflows and improve overall patient care.

Common inefficiencies affecting medical practices

In today's post-pandemic world, medical practices face many of the same challenges. For example:

- **Administrative burdens:** According to Medical Economics' "2022 Physician Report," the top challenges faced by U.S. physicians are largely administrative, including everything from paperwork, to prior authorizations, to electronic health record systems. In fact, physicians spend approximately 4.5 hours per day on EHR-related work.

- **Inefficient workflows:** Many medical practices rely heavily on phones, whether they're calling patients with appointment reminders and follow-ups, or fielding patient calls about scheduling, prescription refills, or lab results. Some practices outsource this work to call centers, but this can be costly and impersonal. What's more, many of these interactions may not need to be phone calls in the first place (more on that later).

- **Financial concerns:** An MGMA Stat poll from June 2022 found that 90 percent of medical practices were seeing costs rise faster than revenues in 2022. This is largely due to widespread inflation, reimbursement cuts, outstanding patient balances, no-show losses, and other rising operating costs.

Poor patient satisfaction: Generally speaking, many Americans are frustrated by the U.S. healthcare system. In fact, nearly 50 percent have a worse view of it as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Actium Health's "Tracking American Sentiment: Managing Healthcare is Hard" report found that Americans want to take better control of their health, but they don't feel like their doctors are engaged enough to make that happen. What's more, 96 percent of patient complaints are around customer service and poor communication — not actual clinical care.

At the end of the day, many of these challenges are the result of operational inefficiencies that may be streamlined with the right technology solutions.

Key technologies for your practice

There's no denying that your practice may benefit from a well-tailored tech stack. The question remains: what should your tech stack look like? While there's no one-size-fits-all solution, the areas that tech can streamline typically fall into three categories — administrative, communication, and clinical — with your athenahealth EHR system sitting at the core.

Your EHR system allows you to centralize many of the clinical and administrative activities of your practice, which may include: patient records and medical histories, appointment documentation and treatment plans, lab data and radiology reports, and other demographic and protected health information (PHI).

96%
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Let's take a deeper look at some of the technologies at the core of a successful practice.

Administrative:

- **Practice management (PM):** Often part of your EHR, a PM system allows you to manage day-to-day administrative tasks such as appointment scheduling, insurance and eligibility, billing processes, and more. If you offer patient portal access, it is sometimes a part of your PM.

- **Point-of-sale (POS):** Often offered as part of your PM system, a POS allows you to collect patient payments in the office.

- **Workforce management:** A workforce management solution helps you manage human resource (HR) activities, including payroll, benefits, and shift scheduling.

- **Marketing and lead generation:** These ultimately help you find new patients and keep current patients engaged. They allow you to manage your website and social channels, send email newsletters, and run and track various marketing campaigns.

Communication:

- **Phone:** A phone system allows you to make and field calls, route calls, and track efficiency.

- **eFax:** With an eFax system, you can digitally exchange documents with third parties.

- **Internal communication:** This system helps you better collaborate and communicate with staff and coworkers on patient-related matters and other topics like team schedules.

- **Patient engagement and communication:** These solutions can help you streamline patient communication by eliminating the need for inefficient phone calls and automating routine touch points via text and/or email. Such touchpoints may include appointment reminders, intake, and follow-up outreach.
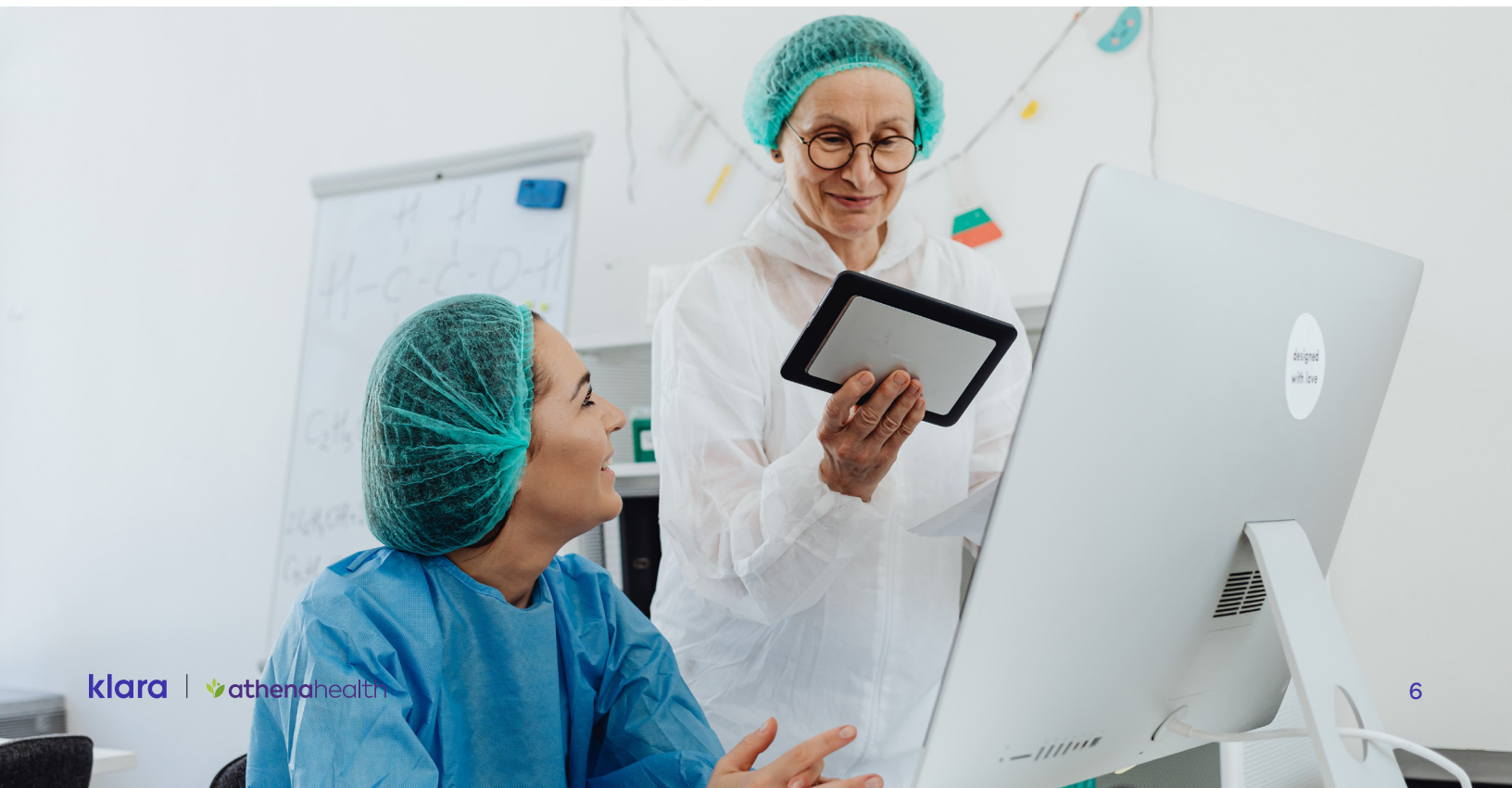
Clinical:

- **Eligibility verification and prior authorization systems:** These allow you to confirm a patient's eligibility for certain medical services or medications, submit and manage prior authorization requests, and more.

- **ePrescribing:** Often part of your PM system, ePrescribing tools let you electronically send prescriptions to a pharmacy from the point of care.

Before you get overwhelmed by this long list of technologies, it's worth noting that you are not required to have every type of tech on this list — nor do you need a unique platform for each bullet. In fact, many health tech providers offer an array of features so you can cover multiple use cases with only a few solutions. Plus, healthcare technology is becoming increasingly interoperable, allowing practices to sync data between systems, avoid duplicate data entry, and eliminate toggling between applications.

Use technology to prioritize the patient experience

To remain competitive, medical practices may want to prioritize their digital transformation sooner than later. Otherwise, their patients — especially millennials and Gen Z — may look elsewhere for modern care models.

❝ Success is not merely measured by adoption of technologies, but rather the impact those technologies have on increasing access, outcomes, and patient satisfaction with their experiences. It is no longer sufficient to just have digital access points. They must serve as connected pathways for patients to easily receive care.

Tom Kiesau, Chief Innovation Officer, Chartis Group
2022 Future of Healthcare Report.

Healthcare technology features to consider

To help get more out of your practice's healthcare technology investments, there are a few features to consider:

- **Interoperability and integrations:** By implementing seamlessly interfaced technology with your EHR and PM systems, you may be able to help de-silo patient record-keeping and communication and promote better collaboration and coordination of care. With interoperable solutions, you may avoid duplicate data entry while keeping patient records accurate and up to date.

- **High patient adoption:** Any patient-facing solutions you use — from communications platforms to patient portals — should be user-friendly and have proven high patient adoption rates. Without high adoption, your patients may not engage.

- **Automation and AI:** Look for solutions that will help automate time-consuming tasks such as calling patients and processing paperwork. Some solutions may even use artificial intelligence to help with automation and further streamline your workflows.

- **Security:** Any solution you choose should be designed for HIPAA-compliant practices and include robust security measures.

- **Scalability:** Choose a solution that will continue to work for your practice as it grows.

- **Virtual care:** What started as a necessity during the COVID-19 pandemic is rapidly becoming a healthcare norm: telemedicine and virtual care. According to McKinsey, telehealth usage levels are 38 times higher now than they were before the pandemic, and 13–17 percent of today's visits are virtual. Needless to say, telemedicine may be here to stay, so make sure to look for a solution that's convenient for both your patients and your staff.

- **Reporting and analytics:** Reporting and analytics tools may help you in multiple areas. First, you may be able to monitor usage, discover areas of improvement, and track overall ROI. Second, you may be able to leverage predictive insights from patient data to identify risk factors and create an informed preventative care protocol for patients.

- **Dedicated support:** Having access to a provider's dedicated support team is important to look for when onboarding a new technology solution as well as if you run into any technical issues or have questions about a particular solution or feature.

One way to learn more about how a solution measures up to these features and characteristics is to take advantage of product demos offered by the company.

83%

of adults are
likely to take
steps to improve
their health

Source

61%

want to hear more
from their doctors

Source

② Patient engagement, defined

Just about all of the tools and technologies that medical practices use today have one goal in common: to improve the quality of care and the patient experience. But it's not just up to the healthcare provider to improve that experience. When patients are more actively engaged with their health and healthcare journey overall, this too can lead to better outcomes. That's why practices should seek to encourage patient engagement whenever possible.

At a high level, patient engagement refers to the practice of getting your patients to be more proactive about their healthcare. When a patient is engaged, they may be more likely to manage preventive care and address chronic conditions by booking appointments and seeing their doctors. Many patients today are more eager than ever to take control of their health — but they feel lost.

In Actium Health's 2022 report on healthcare sentiment, they found that 83 percent of adults were likely or extremely likely to take steps to improve their health in 2022, and 61 percent wanted to hear more from their doctors. But various roadblocks are preventing them from seeking care. And two such roadblocks cited in the report speak to gaps in patient communication: "Making appointments is too much of a hassle" and "I simply forget to make them."

In many cases, there is a clear disconnect between patients and their providers. To help bridge the gap between activated patients and burned-out physicians, medical practices need to leverage the right tools — specifically, those that streamline appointment scheduling for patients, ease workflow inefficiencies for providers, and keep providers top of mind for patients.

> " Our nursing staff loves Klara. They're spending less time playing phone tag and more time actually helping patients.
>
> **Chris McGonnell,** MD, Forest Lane Pediatrics, and athenahealth user

63%
Physician burnout rates nearly doubled between 2020 and 2021
Source

3 Benefits of interfacing your EHR with a patient engagement platform

A **patient engagement platform** can help improve patient communication, increase operational efficiency, and ultimately lead to better care delivery for patients. These results may be more likely if the platform can seamlessly interface with your athenahealth EHR. Other benefits may include:

- **Streamlined workflows:** Automate routine tasks like appointment scheduling and reminders, follow-ups and no-show engagement, intake and billing, and more. By replacing phone calls with texts and opting for digital paperwork collection, your staff may have more time to focus on patient engagement activities and other strategies that have a greater impact on practice growth. It may also be helpful to choose a solution that makes creating and updating automations easy, and uses artificial intelligence to send the most up-to-date information to your patients.

- **Less toggling:** Toggling between apps wastes time and can lead to frustration. While every practice's technology stack is different, having multiple platforms that don't connect can result in consistently switching back and forth between platforms. With the right interface, your patient engagement efforts can automatically sync with your EHR allowing you to work within one platform. For instance, Klara's Chrome extension connects with athenahealth allowing users to work within one platform. When interfaced, you can export patient messages into athenahealth from Klara with the click of a button.

- **More time and less burnout:** A recent Mayo Clinic study that physician burnout rates nearly doubled between 2020 and 2021, rising from 38 percent to 63 percent. Likely due to work-related distress, this burnout has become a major problem for medical practices. With a streamlined athenahealth–patient engagement integration, practices are often able to do more in less time and may be able to decrease staff burnout. This, in turn, could help prevent unnecessary mistakes.
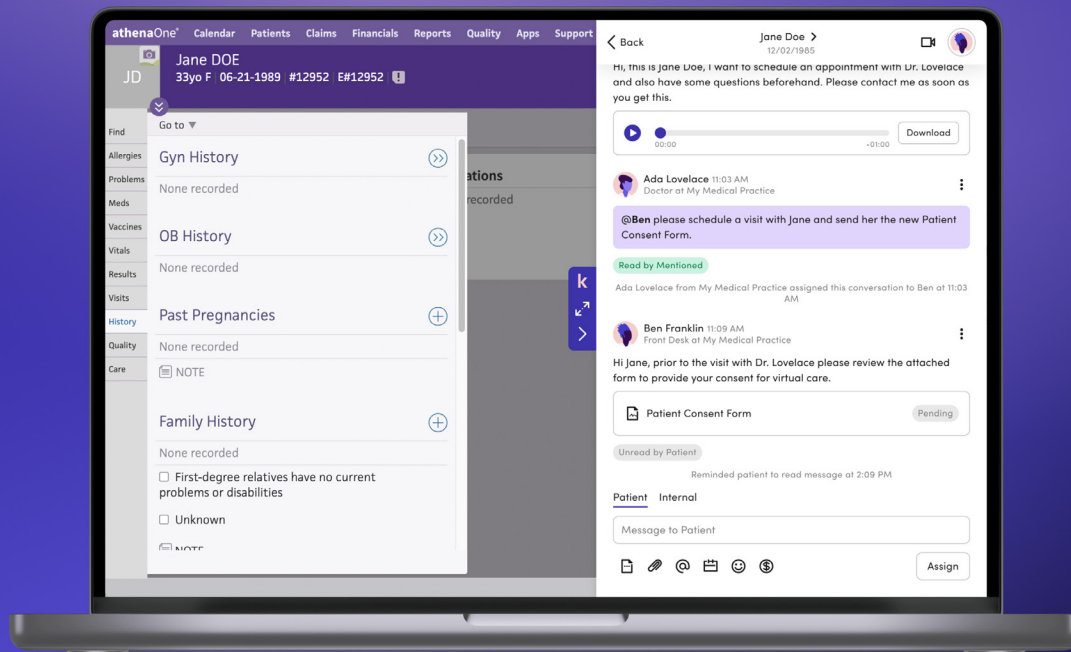
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- **Improved collaboration and coordinated care:** Being able to use a single platform to collaborate with other physicians and medical systems may allow care teams to give patients their best and most up-to-date care possible.

- **Happier and healthier patients:** A connected patient engagement platform may ultimately help you improve the patient experience. On one hand, patients may be able to more easily communicate with your practice and manage appointment scheduling. On the other, your physicians may have more time to deliver quality care during appointments because they won't be bogged down by tedious administrative tasks.

- **Increased revenues:** When medical practices streamline workflows and leverage technology to reduce no-shows, providers may have more time to see more patients — and they can likely offer patients a better experience and care. This quality service may drive more positive online reviews and patient referrals to your practice. All of this can help lead to increased revenues.

So what patient engagement tool will work for your practice and your athenahealth EHR? Check out the next and final section of this white paper to learn how Klara's conversational patient engagement platform may be able to help you streamline communication and keep patients engaged.

> " Before Klara, we relied on the patient portal for all communication. Now, our staff saves time daily by efficiently messaging patients. And patients are used to communicating this way with other common apps — it's a win-win! ... Klara's interface with our athenahealth EMR has been vital to our internal workflows.
>
> **Irene Papaconstadopoulos,** MD, FAAP, CHAMPS Pediatrics, and athenahealth user

Klara + athenahealth: Working together to improve efficiency and patient care

4

Klara's mission is to transform healthcare communication so every patient can receive great care. As part of this, Klara's solutions work seamlessly with athenahealth as well as a growing network of more than 50 EHR and PM systems.

How Klara can help your practice

Klara automates communication across the entire care journey and helps keep patient information centralized and synchronized in your EHR with the following features:

- **Automated patient sync:** Your patient's data will automatically import from athenahealth into Klara. Any changes made in athenahealth will sync with your records in Klara. The same goes for information that originates in Klara. For example, information from your patient's conversation thread — such as patient messages, internal communications, images, documents, files, and even voicemails — will sync to that patient's athenahealth record in just a couple of clicks.

- **Automated form and document export:** Send necessary intake forms and other documents via automated patient texts.

- **Automated pre-visit reminders and instructions:** Help patients prepare for their appointments with automated appointment reminders, intake requests, and relevant instructions, like how to prepare for a particular procedure.

- **Automated post-visit instructions, follow-ups, and review requests:** Keep patients engaged after each appointment with relevant post-visit instructions and check-ins as well as satisfaction surveys and online review requests.

- **Automated no-show engagement:** If a patient misses their appointment, Klara can send them an automated text message to reschedule right from their phones. When Klara is connected to athenahealth, patients will see real-time information on provider availability at your practice.

- **Easy and quick implementation:** As soon as you start using Klara, you'll be able to link patient records automatically. There is no need to manually upload or input patient information.

- **Centralized patient communication:** By turning calls and routine communications into texts (and even transcribing patient voicemails to text), you can centralize inbound and outbound messages into a **single conversation thread**. This allows your team to manage each patient and continue conversations as needed.

- **High patient adoption:** When patients interact with your practice via Klara, it's as simple as texting. Patients don't have to download an app or remember a login or password. And that makes it easy for patients to start using Klara right away. That's why, according to Klara customer data, Klara has an impressive 84% utilization rate (based on Klara data from June 2021–June 2022) — 3x the utilization rate of patient portals.

- **Provider collaboration:** Easily triage patient communications to ensure that the right person responds. Add internal notes and mentions to keep your team on the same page, and coordinate care with third parties, such as other providers or pharmacies.

- **Telemedicine:** Conduct real-time video visits, share your screen to show patients their test results, x-rays, etc., easily exchange messages and images, and document visit notes in the patient's chart — all in one window.

Don't just take it from us

> " Klara has been a game-changer! I have two staff members who no longer have to focus on appointment prep full-time. Now we leverage Klara's technology, and things are much more efficient! I am making better use of our precious human resources.
>
> **Fran Saperstein,** COO and Practice Manager, Center for Complex Neurology, and athenahealth user

The value of using Klara with athenahealth

The same benefits we outlined earlier apply to Klara's conversational patient engagement platform. By leveraging Klara's powerful automation, communication, and telehealth tools, you may be able to help reduce staff burnout, decrease high phone volume, and do more in less time. All of these benefits can lead to happier staff and patients who are more engaged — ultimately helping your practice grow.

Learn how you can power up athenahealth with Klara's conversational patient engagement platform by scheduling a demo today.

Book a demo

5 More resources for practice growth

Interested in learning more about how technology can help your practice grow and thrive?
Check out these resources:

6 Important Factors to look for When Shopping for Medical Practice Technology

Download this white paper to learn six factors to look for when shopping
for medical practice technology that will help your staff improve efficiency.

7 Ways Better Communication May Help Improve Your Bottom Line

Download this white paper to learn seven ways better communication
can help your medical practice's bottom line and patient experience.

Does Your Medical Practice Need a Call Center?

Download this white paper to learn about types of call centers and the
considerations that medical practices should take when deciding whether
to implement one.