Top Trends in HIT Adoption and Optimization—

How Patient Engagement Plays a Key Role

Produced by:

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HEALTHCARE MEDIA

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Introduction

Technology and healthcare are becoming increasingly intertwined. Electronic health records eliminate the need for paper charts. Dictation technologies end countless hours of manual recall for providers, and clinical dashboards highlight valuable insights that help providers identify and close gaps in care.

Yet, health information technology (HIT) adoption is not universal across provider organizations, and well-documented challenges around adoption, information exchange, and optimization still abound.

The federal government has tried to augment the adoption of the industry's most universal technology—the EHR. In 2009 it poured $27 billion in grant funding to hospitals to adopt EHRs under the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinic Health (HITECH) Act. The funding included employee training to streamline rollout; however, eight years later, in 2017, approximately 20 percent of physician practices still lacked a certified EHR.

Provider organizations must begin adopting these technologies independently. The recent technology boom and acceleration of adoption brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic is helping to turn the tide.

As in their daily lives, patients are becoming reliant on technology and expect it from their providers. The pandemic showed most patients they could find care without going into a physical doctor's office, and telehealth enabled them to connect with providers nearly anytime, anywhere.

HIT adoption is becoming a necessity for ambulatory care providers. Adoption and advancement can no longer be left solely to hospitals or health systems. Ambulatory care providers can use HIT solutions to monitor a patient's progress, schedule visits, streamline check-in processes, and highlight gaps in care.

To fully understand the challenges and best practices for HIT adoption in ambulatory care settings, NextGen Healthcare commissioned Xtelligent Healthcare Media to conduct a survey of leaders at these organizations. The survey is the first of a quarterly series to monitor HIT adoption in ambulatory facilities. This quarter's report emphasized patient engagement solutions to understand the technology's relationship with overall HIT strategies.

In total, 103 ambulatory care facility leaders answered the survey. These individuals included decision-makers such as CEOs, CIOs, COOs, directors of quality, and medical directors from ambulatory organizations, including behavioral health, primary care, urgent care, and specialty care practices. All organizations had more than 11 providers, but most (65 percent) had more than 26 providers.

Results highlight four key trends:

1. HIT solutions need to be integrated with existing technology systems to be optimized
2. Provider burden is eased with the right HIT solution
3. Patient engagement HIT solutions enable financial success and patient access
4. Successful patient engagement solutions also ease provider burden

Challenges to patient engagement technology adoption parallel that of general HIT adoption. Regardless of the specific technology, successful rollout and optimization in an ambulatory care setting hinge on integrating existing systems to ease provider burden, enable financial success, and improve patient access.

HIT Solutions Must Be Integrated with Existing Systems

Among survey respondents, most are well underway in their HIT adoption journey. These organizations have HIT solutions in place, but 67 percent are working to optimize these solutions.

Optimization is why most respondents (83 percent) say HIT is a medium to high priority at their organization. Stakeholders want to utilize these technologies to their fullest potential to see proof of their impact on patient outcomes, provider workflow, and financial success.

HIT solutions in place that are not optimized cannot push organizational strategy forward. Rather, disparate technologies often slow provider workflow and inhibit care coordination. Therefore, success hinges on integrating novel HIT solutions with existing systems and workflows.
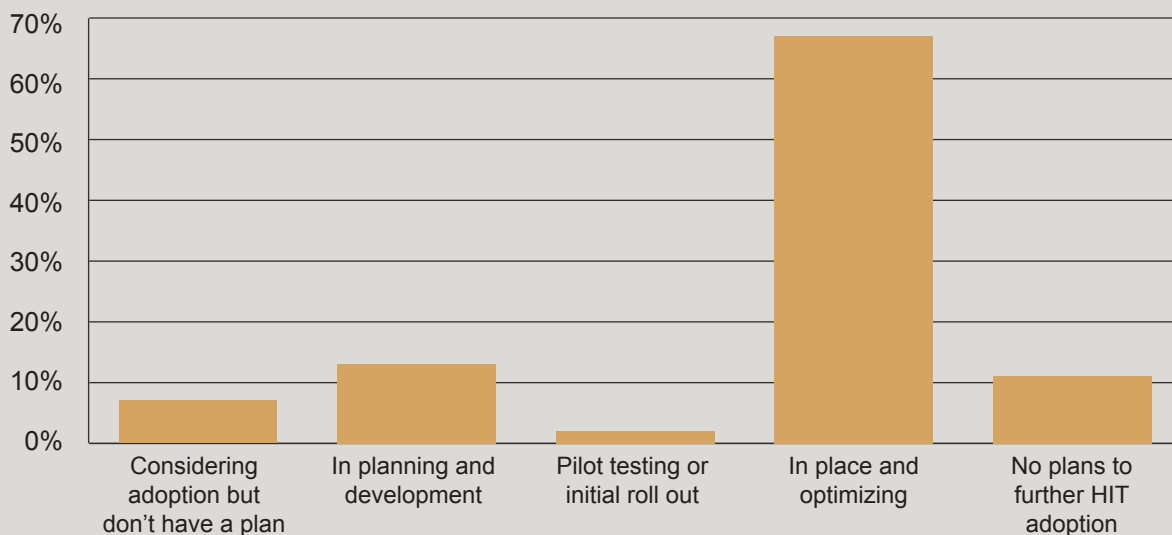
One of the biggest considerations executives at ambulatory care facilities make when selecting a HIT solution is interoperability with existing systems. This is the most significant factor in HIT solution adoption for 58 percent of survey respondents. Another 65 percent say streamlining workflows and ease of use are top of mind when selecting new technology.

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Organizations want technologies that will improve existing systems and streamline workflows for their providers and teams, not make their jobs more challenging.

Where in the health information technology (HIT) adoption journey is your organization?

Category	Value
Considering adoption but don't have a plan	~7%
In planning and development	~13%
Pilot testing or initial roll out	~2%
In place and optimizing	~68%
No plans to further HIT adoption	~11%

HIT Solutions Should Ease Provider Burden

Many ambulatory provider organizations have HIT solutions and are working to optimize their use for providers, staff, and patients. But there are several barriers to successful adoption and optimization, including limited workforce, financial resources, and tailored solutions.

> To help drive adoption, over half (51 percent) of ambulatory care facilities are increasing their training and education.

The biggest challenge to successful HIT adoption, though, is provider adoption. Nearly one-third (31 percent) of ambulatory care executives note that provider uptake of these technologies is the greatest barrier to successful rollout and use.

Technologies intended to streamline workflows should deliver on their promise. However, after years of promises of technologies that would make their lives easier, it is unsurprising that providers are hesitant to dive into the latest and greatest technology their organization is pushin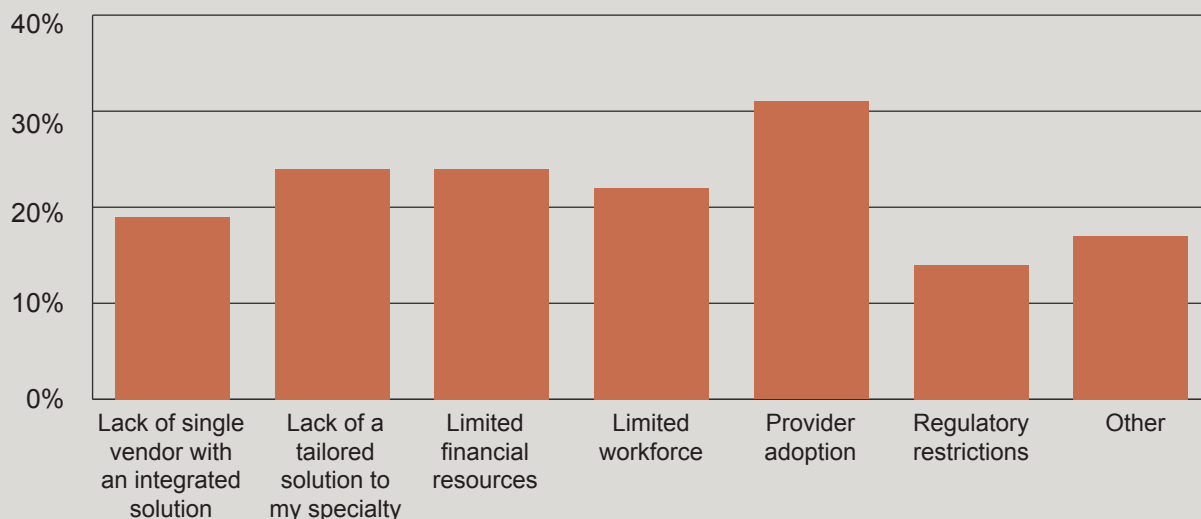g. Technologies that do not integrate with existing systems and create more clicks, more tabs, and, ultimately, more work for providers are not technologies they want to use day-to-day.

Nineteen percent of ambulatory facility executives believe a lack of a single, integrated solution is their biggest challenge to HIT adoption; meanwhile, 24 percent want a solution tailored specifically to their specialty. Those who have existing solutions want new technologies to fit into their practice seamlessly, and those in specific specialties want technologies that understand the nuances of their practice and adjust to their workflows rather than having cookie-cutter applicability.

Bottom line: Providers want technologies that fit best with what they do.

To help drive adoption, over half (51 percent) of ambulatory care facilities are increasing their training and education. Provider burden could be alleviated with training on how to use these technologies effectively. Otherwise, providers will continue to see the technologies as burdens, and adoption rates will plateau after early adoption.

What are the biggest challenges to HIT adoption at your organization?

Challenge	Percentage
Lack of single vendor with an integrated solution	~19%
Lack of a tailored solution to my specialty	~24%
Limited financial resources	~24%
Limited workforce	~22%
Provider adoption	~31%
Regulatory restrictions	~14%
Other	~17%

Patient Engagement Strategies Play a Large Role in Financial Success and Patient Access

Patients are one of the key drivers of new technology adoption. The growth of consumerism in healthcare means patients are demanding more from their care. Patients want their healthcare experience to parallel the convenience they find in their personal lives with online retail or grocery deliveries that allow them to make online purchases for items that will appear at their doorstep the next day. As a result, patients are demanding convenient, easy-to-access technology, and this is helping to drive HIT adoption and increase patient engagement.
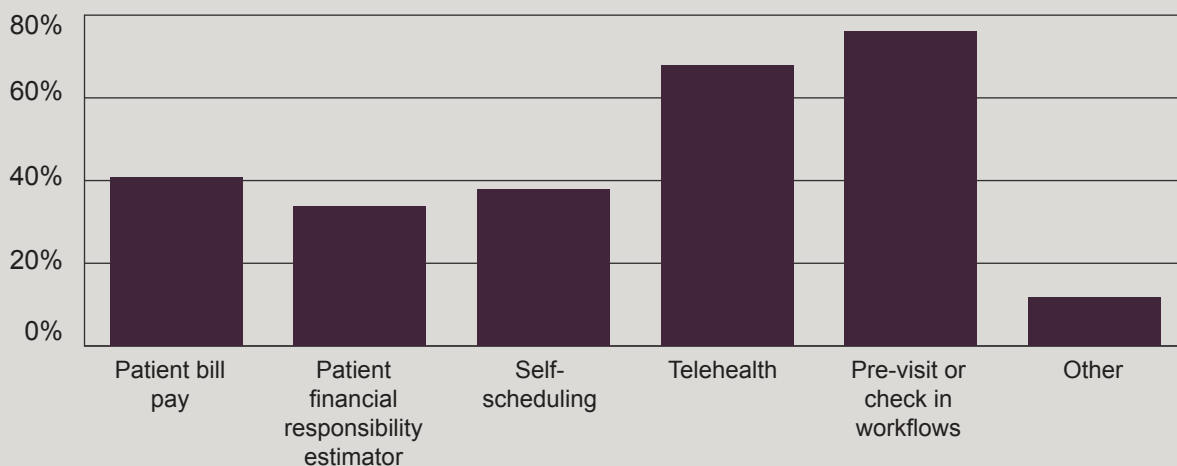
Engaging patients in care more effectively begins with delivering on this need, but the long-term impact for an organization includes better patient outcomes and financial success. Unsurprisingly, 83 percent of survey respondents believe patient engagement solutions play a medium to large role in patient outcomes and organizational financial success.

The best features in a patient engagement HIT solution include pre-visit or check-in workflows and telehealth, between 76 percent and 68 percent of ambulatory care stakeholders say, respectively. These two factors help reduce the number of missed appointments and, in turn, improve patient access. Patients can schedule and receive care from anywhere at any time.

HIT solutions—particularly telehealth—are increasing patient access across the healthcare system. Patients can see their providers from the comfort of their home, car, or office, creating a healthcare experience that fits their needs.

Technologies that meet patient expectations and streamline their interaction with the healthcare system can drive patient satisfaction, and ambulatory practices are driving this positive change.

Which of the following are the most important capabilities in a patient engagement solution ?

Capability	Percentage
Patient bill pay	~40%
Patient financial responsibility estimator	~33%
Self-scheduling	~38%
Telehealth	~68%
Pre-visit or check in workflows	~77%
Other	~11%

Trend 4:
Successful Patient Engagement Hinges on Minimizing Provider Burden

Like HIT solutions generally, the success of patient engagement technologies hinges on provider adoption; providers do not want to utilize technologies that interrupt their workflows or add undue burden onto them.

Patient engagement technologies—like all HIT solutions—should integrate with existing workflows and platforms. Nearly all ambulatory care executives (95 percent) believe these qualities are moderately or very important in a HIT solution.

Hesitancy around adopting new technologies such as remote patient monitoring (RPM) solutions relates to concerns that these technologies will make a provider's job harder rather than easier. Sixty-two percent of survey respondents are concerned about adopting novel technology such as RPM solutions for patient engagement because it will increase clinicians' workload. Many are also worried about large volumes of unfiltered data (48 percent) and clinician liability for that data (45 percent).

Patients want telehealth solutions, which include RPM technologies, but adding work for clinicians stands in the way. Whether it is immediate in a provider's daily workload or the looming responsibility for data collection, storage, and interpretation, healthcare leaders must remain mindful of technology's impact on their workforce.

Easy-to-use technologies that integrate seamlessly into a provider's workflow will be the most widely adopted and successful at engaging patients.

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How important is it for a patient engagement solution to fully integrate with existing workflows and platforms?

- Slightly important 4%
- Not at all important 1%
- Moderately important 30%
- Very Important 65%
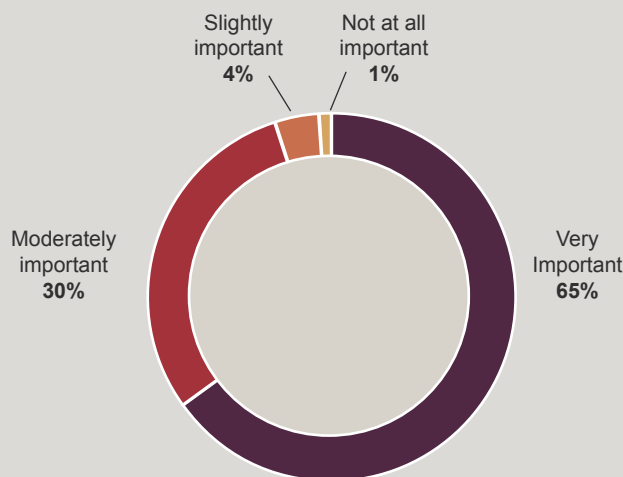
Conclusions

HIT solutions are primarily sought after by provider organizations when they help improve provider workflows, making it easier for providers to maintain necessary documentation while opening more time to spend with patients.

Patients are demanding technologies that make it easier and more convenient for them to access care. Solutions that engage patients in their care can help drive organizational success and meet patient expectations.

To help drive adoption, decision-makers must consider the impact of these solutions on provider workflow, including patient engagement technologies. While these solutions increase patient satisfaction and access, they can add an undue burden on providers if not integrated into existing systems and workflows. Ineffective HIT will not be successfully utilized by providers.

Ambulatory care leaders continue to work on optimizing their HIT solutions because these technologies will continue to drive access, outcomes, and satisfaction.

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About NextGen Healthcare:

NextGen Healthcare, Inc. (Nasdaq: NXGN) is a leading provider of ambulatory-focused technology solutions. We are empowering the transformation of ambulatory care—partnering with medical, behavioral, and dental providers in their journey to value-based care to make healthcare better for everyone. We go beyond EHR and PM. Our integrated solutions help increase clinical productivity, enrich the patient experience, and ensure healthy financial outcomes. We believe in better. Learn more at nextgen.com, and follow us on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and Instagram.