



A partner in employee well-being

Streamlined healthcare navigation for a large workforce de-escalates care and drives utilization of network programs and services

About

- 8 hospitals and several emergency centers and physical therapy clinics serving the greater Houston, TX area
- U.S. News & World Report’s No. 1 hospital in Texas and one of America’s Best Hospitals
- Worldwide recognition in multiple specialties
- 25,543 employees

Challenges

- Wanted to improve utilization of employee programs and benefits
- Needed to contain costs and help employees avoid unnecessary care
- Limited ability to impact employees’ decisions about treatment

Solution

- Buoy

Results

- Easy-to-use healthcare navigation platform available to all employees
- 36,000 unique views of Buoy in first 12 months
- Over 2,000 Buoy interviews completed to date
- 30% de-escalated from urgent care to less costly care in first 12 months
- 38% de-escalated from specialist care to less costly care in first 12 months
- Increased awareness of in-network services and programs

The Houston Methodist benefits team administers a complex network of programs to over 25,000 employees. “We focus on keeping our employees thriving both in and out of the workplace,” said Janay Andrade, Director of Benefits and Executive/Physician Services. “We are very proud of the range of programs we offer to employees and their families.”

With such an extensive offering, it was sometimes challenging to help employees identify the benefits available to them in the moment they needed a particular service. And it was difficult to steer employees to the right level and type of care — for example, avoiding unnecessary trips to the emergency room when a lower-cost option would have been appropriate.

To solve this, Andrade and her team implemented Buoy’s AI-driven healthcare navigation platform. “As an organization, we are always looking for ways to innovate,” said Andrade. “When we considered our challenges around overutilization of emergency rooms, and how to put answers and solutions at people’s fingertips, Buoy seemed like a good opportunity for us to do that.”

Buoy reaches employees where they are

Houston Methodist employees access Buoy in the moment they have a health question or concern on the device that is most convenient for them. “Because we are a hospital system, our employees aren’t necessarily at a computer all day,” said Andrade. “We do know that most of our people have smartphones. So having Buoy available on any internet-connected device is important.”

Employees navigate to Buoy in a variety of ways. One option is to go to the co-branded benefits dashboard that Houston Methodist employees can access from anywhere. From the dashboard, employees can search for a provider

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- Janay Andrade, Director of Benefits and Executive/Physician Services, Houston Methodist

or program in the Houston Methodist benefits network or start a Buoy interview. Employees also find Buoy when they search for a symptom or health concern online. That's because Buoy ranks on the first page of Google for over 52,000 symptoms.

In order to understand the health concern that an employee or a family member has, and make recommendations for the best steps to take, Buoy starts with a two- to four-minute interview. Buoy draws from medical literature to ask questions and narrow down what's going on. Then Buoy presents relevant education and recommendations for the next step in care. This includes pointing employees to appropriate programs and services within the Houston Methodist network.

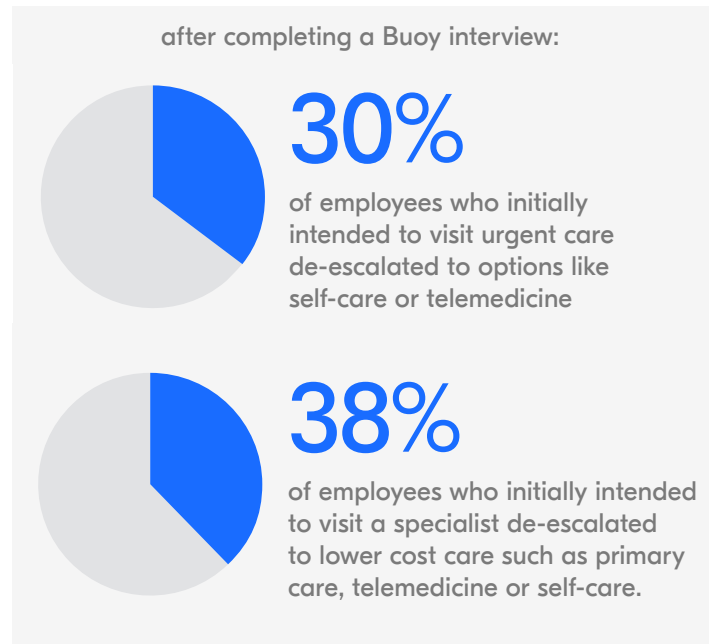
Easy rollout, significant impact

Getting started with Buoy was a straightforward process at Houston Methodist. Andrade and her team publicized Buoy to employees using their traditional communication channels such as a weekly newsletter and by developing meeting decks that leaders could share with staff. Buoy provided templated communications to support their effort. Since employees can use Buoy right away without the barrier of signing up, Andrade sent communications about Buoy during a time that wasn't busy with the promotion of other services. "I liked that Buoy could be rolled out with a simple text message and didn't get lost in the shuffle of open enrollment," said Andrade.



In the first year of use, Buoy's dashboard logged 36,000 unique views. Employees completed over 2,000 Buoy interviews, which represents more than nine percent of the Houston Methodist workforce. Those interactions had several key impacts. First was a clear de-escalation of care away from costly sites like urgent and emergency care, as well as an uptick in the use of telemedicine. For example,

over 30 percent of employees who initially intended to visit urgent care de-escalated to options like self-care or telemedicine after completing a Buoy interview. Equally important, over 38 percent of employees who initially intended to visit a specialist de-escalated to lower cost care such as primary care, telemedicine or self-care. These types of outcomes positively impacted employee health and satisfaction, contained the healthcare spend, and did not impact the quality of care employees received.



Buoy is a powerful connector to appropriate programs and benefits. The benefits team had particularly wanted to promote use of its new virtual urgent care program in addition to generally simplifying access to its complex network. After implementing Buoy, the team was pleased to see improved utilization of virtual urgent care — in addition to more awareness of available programs — while ensuring employees followed the best clinical pathway for their situation. When employees can immediately see what to do next, this helps ensure that they follow up with in-network services. "Being able to give employees personalized recommendations for the right level of treatment is a significant benefit," said Andrade. "And tying that into where to go was even better, because we want to drive people to specific sites in our network, like our virtual urgent care program. Offering employees both treatment education and program recommendations was a really good value add for us."

Buoy is a partner in enhancing employee well-being

When the pandemic started, Buoy worked with the Houston Methodist benefits team to develop COVID-19 screening, helping employees decide whether they needed to self-isolate and get tested. The team saw a sharp uptick in the use of telemedicine and knew that Buoy played a role in directing employees to appropriate care. “Even during the pandemic, Buoy has helped keep our employees connected to the right care and benefits in a streamlined way,” said Andrade.

CC Huong Nguyen, Benefits Manager, described Buoy as a flexible and responsive partner. “I’ve enjoyed working with the staff at Buoy because everyone is positive and collaborative. Even through the COVID-19 crisis, whatever we asked for, it was reviewed, considered, and implemented. I really appreciate that kind of relationship.”

Andrade relies on Buoy as a valued partner in employee well-being. “My driving passion is working to improve the health status of our employees and their dependents,” said Andrade. “We work hard to offer products and services that people find valuable, improve their health and therefore improve their lives.” Andrade explained that Buoy shared the organization’s values around compassion, excellence and innovation. “That certainly is a goal we share with Buoy: we innovate, we work together, and know that we can get somewhere better together.”

The image features a stylized illustration of a building facade in shades of blue. On the right side, a prominent blue rectangular sign contains the text "HOUSTON Methodist" in white, with "HOUSTON" in a smaller font above "Methodist". Below "Methodist" is the tagline "LEADING MEDICINE" in a smaller, all-caps font. To the left of the building, there are stylized green bushes and a dark blue silhouette of a person's head and shoulders. The entire illustration is set against a white background.

HOUSTON
Methodist
LEADING MEDICINE