



# Provider-Patient Texting Is Poised for Growth

Ninety-one percent of smartphone owners in the U.S. sent at least one text message per week from their phone last year.<sup>1</sup> Sending and receiving text messages is now routine and, as a result, patients have come to expect text communications from their healthcare providers. To gain a deeper understanding of how texting is impacting healthcare, West surveyed patients and healthcare providers and found that interest in communicating through text messaging is on the rise, patients want providers to use text messages to deliver certain types of communications, and providers must adapt to meet patients' expectations.

## Preference for Text Communications on the Rise

Patients are more than three times as likely to text with healthcare professionals today as they were in 2011. In 2011, just five percent of patients reported that they had sent a text message to one of their healthcare providers. Now, 17 percent of patients have texted a healthcare provider.

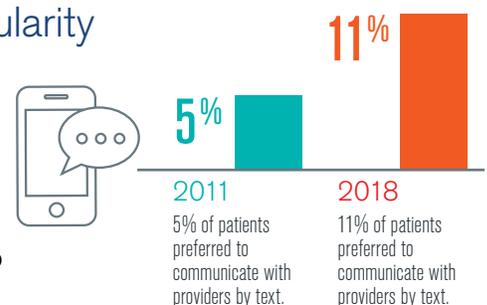
Not only have text exchanges between providers and patients become more common, but patients' demand for texting has grown rapidly. Patients are now twice as likely to want their healthcare providers to text them compared to seven years ago.

Millennials are particularly interested in receiving text messages from their healthcare teams. Fifteen percent of millennials say they would prefer to receive text message communications

over any other form of communication from the healthcare providers they frequent. With the U.S. Census Bureau projecting the population of millennials will surpass baby boomers within the next year,<sup>2</sup> healthcare providers need to expand their texting communication options as the preferences of this large, up-and-coming group of patients will further drive the demand for texting in healthcare.

## Provider-Patient Texting Gaining Popularity

Patients are now twice as likely to want their healthcare providers to text them compared to seven years ago.



# Patients Expect Text Communications to Go Beyond Appointment Reminders

Now that Americans are accustomed to receiving text message appointment reminders, a majority of patients say they would be very or extremely willing to text with their providers to confirm appointments (71%), reschedule appointments (65%) and cancel appointments (64%). However, appointment-related text messages barely scratch the surface of patient expectations.

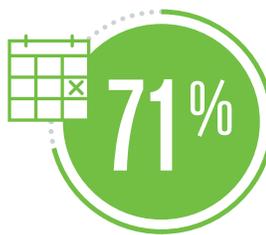
Sixty percent of patients say it is very or extremely important for their healthcare provider to text them with communications about remote health monitoring, preventive care, disease management, billing and scheduling delays. To that end, 64 percent of patients are extremely or very willing to receive text messages about post-treatment instructions, and 59 percent are extremely or very interested in text messages that deliver survey check-ins to monitor and collect patient-reported health data.

Nearly all patients would like to receive texts that support preventive care. In fact, 95 percent say it is important for healthcare providers to make preventive care recommendations and schedule appointments for preventive screenings and services through text messages.

Eighty percent of patients with chronic conditions want their healthcare providers to text them between in-person visits with information about their condition and upcoming appointments. Not only do chronic patients expect this type of between-visit engagement, they also would appreciate texts about non-medical topics like billing or delays that impact appointments. Eighty-three percent of patients want to receive text messages regarding copayment information and reminders. Additionally, 80 percent of patients want to receive messages from healthcare professionals when there are scheduling delays, similar to the text messages and notifications they get from service providers in other industries.

## Patients Want Text Communications for Appointment Reminders

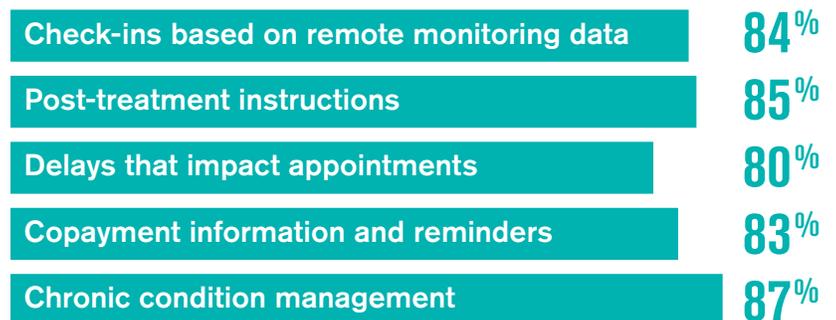
### APPOINTMENT REMINDERS



of patients are very interested in receiving appointment reminder text messages to confirm appointments.

### BEYOND APPOINTMENT REMINDERS

In addition to appointment reminder texts, patients want providers to text information about:



## How Providers Can Meet Patients' Communication Expectations

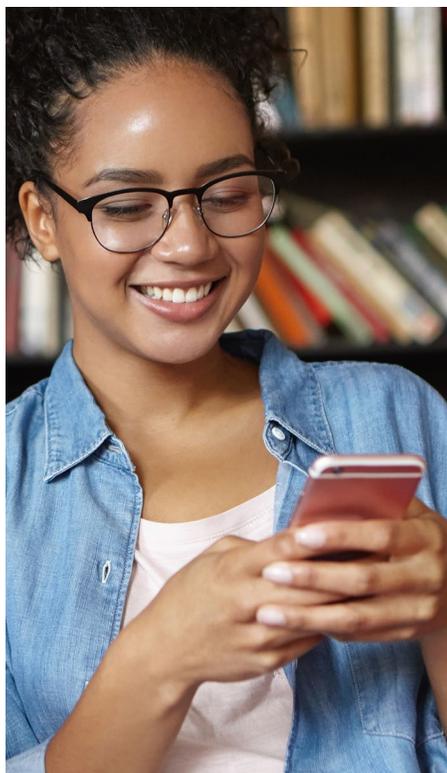
To date, texting has primarily been used by healthcare organizations to remind patients to keep appointments. But, patients expect more. Six in ten Americans (60%) say it is extremely or very important for their healthcare providers to communicate with them via texting outside of in-person appointments. To deliver on this expectation, healthcare teams can leverage the same patient engagement technology they use for appointment reminders to create and send a wide range of targeted and efficient text communications. This engagement technology can be used to schedule and deliver text communications to patients en masse or, if warranted, initiate a text chat with an individual patient. The following examples articulate how healthcare teams can maximize text messages to communicate with patients.

## Preventive Care

Despite more than nine in ten patients (95%) wanting doctors to make preventive care recommendations and proactively schedule appointments for preventive screenings and services, providers are not consistently doing this. One in four providers (25%) reports their organization does a fair or poor job of proactively making preventive care recommendations, or they do not do it at all. Many providers might not realize how easy it is to use technology to schedule and send text messages that share information about preventive health. Whether providers want to invite patients to an upcoming community health fair or flu shot clinic, notify patients about covered preventive services they are eligible to receive at no cost, or send messages to encourage patients to get active or choose other healthy lifestyle behaviors, healthcare teams can use their engagement technology to send prevention-themed text messages to their patients. They can also use these text messages to help patients schedule preventive care screenings and tests.

## Post-Treatment Instructions

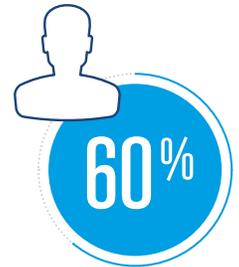
A mere seven percent of providers have texted with patients communicating post-treatment instructions, even though more than eight in ten patients (85%) report wanting to receive text messages providing this information. Using text messages to deliver post-operative or other post-treatment instructions is simple when providers use their engagement technology. Providers can send patients a text message containing a link to a portal or site where they can view instructions. This lets healthcare teams easily share important information following inpatient or outpatient procedures, when adherence to care instructions is especially critical.



## Texts from Healthcare Providers are a High Priority for Patients

60% of patients say it is very or extremely important for their healthcare provider to text them about:

- remote health monitoring
- preventive care
- disease management
- billing
- scheduling delays



## Remote Health Monitoring

Although 84 percent of patients want providers to monitor their health remotely, just six percent of providers have texted with patients to check in and discuss health data captured through remote monitoring. Patients—particularly those with chronic health conditions—want providers to proactively monitor their health and contact them if issues are detected. Healthcare teams can monitor patients and provide chronic care support by sending text messages containing instructions and a link to complete a survey check-in that asks patients to respond to questions and provide feedback about their health. These texts can be sent on an ad hoc or situational basis, such as following up with patients after their release from the hospital, or more regularly to support ongoing health monitoring.

## Disease Management

More than eight in ten patients with chronic conditions (87%) want providers to use between-visit communications—like text messages—to support chronic disease management, but less than one-third (31%) of providers regularly communicate with patients about chronic disease management outside of in-person appointments. By using engagement technology, healthcare providers can send text messages with tips and reminders for managing hypertension, diabetes and other chronic conditions that are heavily impacted by behavior and lifestyle.

## Billing and Payments

Only six percent of providers have texted patients about copayments. But patients want transparency when it comes to healthcare payments, and more than eight in ten patients (83%) want to be texted copayment information and reminders. Healthcare teams can send text messages to notify patients about copayment responsibilities prior to appointments. Then, following appointments, providers can schedule and send payment reminder text messages to patients notifying them of payment due dates. Healthcare teams can also initiate one-to-one text chats to check in with patients who have missed payment deadlines.

## Scheduling Delays

Less than half (49%) of healthcare providers send any notifications—text messages, voice calls or emails—to patients when there are scheduling delays that impact their healthcare or appointments. Patients, however, say long waits for providers are frustrating and they wish providers would do more to minimize appointment wait times. Eight in ten patients (80%) suggest they want to receive notifications about delayed appointments. To improve communication, when a provider is running late or out sick, staff can easily select one or a group of impacted patients and send them a text message notifying them of changes to their scheduled appointment. This is a quick and convenient way to connect with patients who may be more likely to see and act on text messages rather than voicemails.



Text messages are an in-demand communication and their popularity among patients and providers is poised for growth. Adding or increasing the usage of texting is relatively easy for providers, and it is something patients say they want and expect. Rather than settling for using text messages only to remind patients about appointments, providers can—and should—give their patient communications an upgrade. They can do this by utilizing the technology they already have in place to initiate countless new types of text exchanges with patients.

### SOURCES:

<sup>1</sup> <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/technology-media-and-telecommunications/articles/global-mobile-consumer-survey-us-edition.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/01/millennials-overtake-baby-boomers/>