



How COVID-19 Has Changed Patient Experience Forever

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We've all seen countless headlines about how the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic has changed customer experience (CX). The experience world has also become inundated with studies and articles about COVID-19's effects on employees, from the impact of working remotely to being laid off amid the farthest-reaching health crisis in over a century.

One topic that hasn't been studied quite as much despite its arguably grander repercussions is how COVID-19 has affected patient experience (PX). There's a glut of stories out there about crowded hospitals and the challenges various healthcare systems face... but how exactly has COVID changed patients' in-hospital experience or interactions with healthcare brands? Relatedly, how can these organizations adapt to the changes the Coronavirus has rendered upon patient experience?

Here's how COVID-19 has changed patient experience forever—and what healthcare brands can do about it.

HEIGHTENED CLEANLINESS AND SAFETY AWARENESS

If patients weren't already concerned about the cleanliness of hospitals and other healthcare facilities, they certainly are now. Though it should surprise no one, patients worldwide are more preoccupied with hospitals' physical hygiene and staff safety measures now than at any point in recent history. Healthcare brands espouse safety and cleanliness as a matter of course, but these days, it's a matter of brand survival.

Patients' concern for safety in the age of COVID goes far beyond clean surfaces and face masks. Entering the hospital, moving safely through the facility, fulfilling appointments, and other actions most of us would've considered trivial just six months ago are now at the top of many patients' safety priorities. The expected and common perception that patient areas are properly clean and disinfected has now required healthcare

organizations to remind patients with signage and other protocol indicators.

Suddenly, patients and any visitors allowed are cataloging their every move within a hospital as a calculated risk, and have been since this pandemic began in earnest.

Catering to a heightened fear of disease is no small task, but it's something that healthcare brands must do if they want to succeed for themselves and their patients amid this pandemic. Healthcare consumers want assurance that providers are taking COVID seriously at every touchpoint of their journey, and hospitals must provide that assurance in highly visible ways. Con-

tinuous reassurance from staff, increased signage, and demonstration of cleanliness in front of patients (e.g., hand hygiene) helps healthcare brands address patients' safety concerns and continuously convey that commitment.

VIRTUAL VISIT VALUES

COVID's impact on patient experience goes far beyond in-person visits. In an age where working from home has become the norm for many folks and social distancing makes some patients anxious about visiting *any* physical space, let alone a hospital, healthcare brands must be

aware of COVID's impact on telemedicine and how to address it.

First, healthcare brands need to reconsider how they collect user data and feedback from patients when telemedicine has suddenly exploded in use. This means understanding that the patient experience changes dramatically when users move from walk-in to call-in and click-in appointments. Healthcare brands can rise to this challenge not just by offering feedback options during and after visits, but by constantly taking action on the preferences patients express and promoting inclusiveness across care venues.



RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

Meaningful action is the crux of healthcare brand survival amid COVID-19. Many healthcare brands and hospitals have already had to make major changes in response to the pandemic, but as we all know, experience improvement initiatives are not something that any brand, especially in healthcare, can afford to set and forget. What patients consider an adequate cleanliness or safety measure today may be rendered obsolete by next week's CDC update.

In other words, COVID-19 has changed patient experience by heightening both healthcare customers' attention to safety and the speed at which they expect providers to respond. Healthcare providers that immediately rise to the challenge of listening to their patients, installing the safety and assurance measures they seek, and demonstrating changes as needed will both outlast COVID and thrive beyond it. Leading organizations are soliciting feedback now to determine how patients and visitors would like to see pandemic-related operational changes continue or change beyond this event. Much like medicine itself, the key to providing a connective, emotional patient experience is taking action toward meaningful improvement. Brands that can achieve and maintain that transformational momentum will find continuous success for themselves and their customers in the age of COVID.



The graphic features a blue background with a white banner at the top. On the left of the banner is a gold seal with a checkmark and the text 'COVID SAFE'. To the right is the Memorial Hospital logo, a green cross followed by the text 'Memorial Hospital'. Below the banner is a photograph of a healthcare professional interacting with a patient in a waiting area. Underneath the photo, the text reads: 'We know this is a stressful time, and we want to make it easier for you.' Below that, it says: 'Complete this survey to tell us about your experience – and how else we can help.' At the bottom center is a QR code with a green cross in the middle.

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