



Online Self-Scheduling Boosts Clinical Productivity and Patient Engagement



Online appointment scheduling by patients has the potential to save the healthcare industry more time and money than sophisticated new telemedicine technologies, according to recent research. Over the next five years, the relatively simple change will save more clinics, doctors' offices and hospitals time and money by eliminating the need for schedulers to reach patients by phone when appointments must be set, canceled or changed. A report published by global management consulting firm Accenture estimated that savings could amount to \$3.2 billion in scheduler capacity by the end of 2019.

Hospitals Learn From Hospitality Sector

Hospitals are following the hospitality industry in adopting online self-scheduling options for consumers. The convenience of being able to set appointments even when medical offices are closed saves time for busy customers and administrators whose appointment volume can be successfully diverted through online scheduling. The time savings are easy to explain: it typically takes less than one minute to set an appointment online, versus eight minutes spent on the phone. Furthermore, patients are demanding the change as they engage more in their healthcare experience. Hospitals competing for customers in local markets should adopt tools for convenient self-scheduling or risk losing patient volume.

Accenture surveyed the US healthcare systems with the highest revenue to understand their current self-scheduling capabilities, and used industry data for its five-year forecast. The report estimates that two thirds of healthcare systems in the US will offer patients online self-scheduling of appointments by the year 2019, with 38 percent of appointments becoming self-scheduled. "It can improve the patient experience, create value, save time, and improve clinician capacity, especially in areas like primary care," said Accenture Health Managing Director Frances Dare.

Self-Scheduling Challenges and Opportunities

Improvements in efficiency and cost control are already being noticed by organisations who embrace the change, but there is substantial room for improvement. Currently, online self-scheduling is offered by only 10 percent of smaller healthcare organisations, compared with 40 percent of the largest systems. Even within that 40 percent, only about half of appointments are booked online. Across the US, only 2.4 percent of patients used online appointment scheduling in the 11 percent of healthcare systems which offered the option.

One challenge to the widespread adoption of online self-scheduling, even where it is offered, is the preference for retirees to conduct business over the phone. This obstacle can be managed by patient education, and hearty doses of patience and perseverance when websites are having technical difficulties. Still, it is likely the some customers will always prefer the assurance of a human voice at the other end of a telephone line when scheduling their medical appointments.

Source: [Accenture](#)

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