As healthcare rapidly evolves worldwide, we have seen how important it is to help inform patients, personalize their care experiences, and activate their role in driving better outcomes. With growing consumer needs, the following trends promise to continue shaping the ongoing demand for stronger patient education.
#1. Higher patient expectations. Although we've talked for years about the “consumerization” of healthcare, COVID-19 is raising consumer expectations to new heights. Telehealth is one example. Patients previously inclined to seek health information on Google or YouTube now also want easy-to-access, consumer-oriented multimedia experiences with trusted information directly from their clinicians. Moving forward, healthcare organizations will need to give patients the convenience of personalized and evidence-based education that's optimized for their preferred devices.

#2. Wider digital front doors. The benefits and demand of remote engagement and telehealth have quickly emerged in response to COVID-19. For example, more healthcare organizations are empowering patients to take better control of their own health through digital platforms that make it easy to place the right information at their fingertips. With increasingly available digital access, personalized education can reflect not only each patient's unique preferences and health literacy level, but also where they are on their individual care journey. Likewise, telehealth visits also have become a “go-to” solution as healthcare organizations try to safely limit the risk of exposure to COVID-19 while ensuring continuity of care for patients with chronic conditions. Very few expect telehealth demand to drop when the pandemic ends. More likely, we'll see an even greater desire for the patient-centered convenience of digital healthcare solutions.

#3. Varied health literacy levels. Hand-in-hand with consumerization and digital access is another trend crucial to patient engagement: health literacy. To truly meet patients where they are with the right educational materials, health systems must address a wide variety of health literacy levels. Patients not only expect to see information delivered directly to their personal devices, they now expect that education to be in their preferred language, at their reading level, and in terms that are actionable and meaningful to their understanding and their conditions.

#4. Growing case complexity. Despite advances in telehealth, the number of patients delaying needed care has surged during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, many clinicians anticipate higher volumes of patients with more severe chronic diseases and comorbidities. To better manage complex cases efficiently, clinicians across disciplines will need to empower patients at every touchpoint with educational materials that provide standardized, evidence-based information.

#5. Greater post-discharge accountability. One trend that's not likely to disappear soon is the prevalence of value-based care agreements that link facility reimbursement with readmission rates to health outcomes. To address quality outcomes, health systems must help patients make smart care management choices once they go home. Comprehensive, evidence-based patient education in their preferred consumable format can help ensure patients get the best guidance possible even after they've left the facility. By specifically tracking which information is actually used by each patient, clinicians can take a targeted, patient-centered approach to post-discharge support and learning reinforcement.

#6. More insightful analytics. Accessible data analytics is key to measuring the impact of patient education. What many healthcare organizations are finding, however, is that their current surface-level metrics reveal little about actual patient engagement. Deeper patient engagement requires data and analytics that track how patients interact with education materials after discharge — what they use, what they like, what they don't like, etc. This allows clinicians to adjust education as needed for more successful outcomes.

The world of patient education is changing as quickly as healthcare itself. A steady focus on strengthening patient education will continue to play an essential role in improving the patient experience and patient outcomes — both now and in the future.

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