

Shifting your Children's Hospital from Patient-Centric to Consumer-Centric

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Parents want their kids to be healthy and when they're ill, they want them to be treated and back to their routines as quickly as possible. As children's hospitals plan to grow their market share they must look beyond creating an amazing inpatient experience and create a consumer-centric experience that focuses on care outside the hospital setting.

New entrants such as large health systems expanding into broader pediatric care, concierge medicine, direct to consumer offerings, and freestanding urgent and immediate care clinics make access to pediatric care easier. At the same time, Medicaid reimbursement, Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and commercial rates have supported healthy margins at many children's hospitals, but potential funding cuts and the move to more narrow networks pose a threat in the future. While children's hospitals have deep expertise in pediatric care and the most advanced treatment options, they must do more.

For children's hospitals, having the best care is no longer enough; they must create new ways to

engage with children and families when they're well, have minor illnesses and during serious medical challenges. If they fail to respond they risk losing market share to those who are making pediatric care easier for families.

Rethink the Office Visit

Between fevers, ear infections, vaccinations and sports physicals, it's almost inevitable that a child will require a visit to their physician more than once a year. Make appointments with providers as easy as possible so families use your services for all types of care.

- **Offer care in new ways.** While after-hours appointments are convenient, they pale in comparison to the convenience brought about by new care delivery models. Look for new ways to deliver care through telehealth, video visits, and potentially even home visits in markets that support this approach. Also, leverage your nurses' expertise to determine if alternatives to the in-office visit are appropriate based on a patient's condition.
- **Collaborate with the community.** With telemedicine, schools and daycares can connect children with a provider via a video visit and parents can join from a different location. Providing this service allows children to be

diagnosed quickly and parents to be present even if they physically can't be with their child.

- **Find child-friendly locations.** With retail clinics like [CVS Minute Clinic](#) offering sports physicals and immunizations on a drop-in basis, parents don't need to book an appointment months in advance, nor do they need to drive out of their way to sit in a crowded waiting room filled with sick kids. Take a page in convenience from the [2,800 retail clinics](#) and put offices near places that families go like shopping centers, amusement parks and movie theatres.
- **Make it flexible.** Just like restaurants accommodate reservations and walk-ins, equip your office to do the same. Leverage technology for those who have scheduled appointments to alert them if their provider is running behind and for walk-ins, provide them with updates on "their place in line" enabling them to leave your facility until it's time for their appointment.
- **Consider concierge medicine.** With this service, consumers pay a flat fee for a set of healthcare services that typically include longer visits, physicals, sick visits and phone calls with their provider. While most concierge services are independently owned, they offer children's hospitals the opportunity to offer a more personalized healthcare experience, proactively take steps to keep kids well and help manage chronic health conditions.

Ultimately, by becoming more accessible, you can ensure that those seeking out care from your institution don't have to even think twice as they make a call for care. They'll know that between the multitude of care delivery options, there's bound to be one that fits their lifestyle and their child's health needs.

Manage Health for the Long Term

Obesity, diabetes and asthma are on the rise and as a result more kids and families focus on managing these conditions daily. Managing these conditions

in a way where a child's daily activities are minimally interrupted will be key. At the same time, preventive measures to keep these chronic health conditions at bay require a laser-sharp focus on care.

- **Embrace technology.** To minimize the time that children with chronic illnesses are in a care setting, providers must begin to think about innovative solutions that offer minimal disruption to their daily lives. Consider investments in innovative solutions that would enable consumers to manage their health in new ways with things like wearables or exercise and nutrition logs that give providers a view into their lifestyle without them needing to come in for an appointment.
- **Provide education.** For consumers, educational opportunities in the communities they live could also increase adherence and engagement with your organization. Support groups whether virtual or in person provide a spot for children and their families to have their questions answered by others, engage with providers and learn more about treatment options.
- **Begin your CRM journey.** Customer relationship management (CRM) software has taken off in many industries to deliver a more personalized experience. For children's hospitals, the same can be true. With CRMs, children's hospitals can ensure that the right patient is receiving the right message at the right time based on their age and health needs. In addition, if you have a renowned specialty, you can connect with parents and children beyond your existing patient population that would benefit from your services. This will help you attract new consumers. At the same time, CRMs simplify the care experience with reminders for appointments and pre-visit activities like assessments shared with the families in advance.

Focusing on care outside the hospital not only makes for a better experience for the kids and their families, but it will help to build your brand's reputation in the market allowing you to be top of mind and the sought-out destination for care. Ultimately your bottom line will benefit as you attract and retain families for life.

Treat the Entire Family During Serious Illness

The hospital and even clinic visits, can be uncertain, it's stressful and being there is not part of a normal routine for kids, their parents and the rest of their family. Whether a child is there for a long clinic visit, a few days, or a few weeks, it disrupts a family, especially when they must travel for care. Seek out ways to reduce strain on the family so that regardless of where they live, parents choose your hospital for care.

- **Offer concierge services.** Just like concierge medicine can create a more personalized experience in the outpatient setting, concierge services can also make hospital stays less stressful. In the same way that concierge services are leveraged by the likes of Disney World to make the experience at their parks less stressful by coordinating childcare, dinner reservations and transportation, children's hospitals could do the same. [Cincinnati Children's Guest Services](#) plans the logistics of everything from travel arrangements for out of town families to entertainment activities for the whole family, enabling the family to focus on the sick child rather than logistics.
- **Send children home sooner.** Also look at ways to get children home sooner with home health offerings, video visits, remote patient monitoring and collaborations with local providers who can handle follow up visits. In doing so, your services will be more accessible which can be a differentiator in the market and expand your market.

For children's hospitals, becoming the destination for care in an increasingly competitive and cluttered healthcare landscape presents many challenges. But these challenges are ones that can be overcome by beginning to think about the consumers as the whole family and creating a care model that makes healthcare as minimally disruptive as possible.

Key Takeaways

To attract and retain children and their families, children's hospitals must reinvent the care delivery model to one that's not just patientcentric, but consumer-centric. To do so:

Think differently.

Identify pain points that could be seen as barriers for receiving care.

Plan differently.

Develop a strategy to increase access, build a continuous relationship and push care outside the hospital.

Act differently.

Invest in technologies that will reduce the number of days children have to spend in traditional care settings.



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