

UNDERSTANDING PHYSICIAN ENGAGEMENTS IN A COVID-19 IMPACTED WORLD

CHICAGO, IL, UNITED STATES, April 23, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- COVID-19 Accelerating Physicians' Adoption of Telehealth and Changing Prescribing Practices Says New Survey from AbelsonTaylor

Pandemic Also Altering Physicians' Interactions with Healthcare Sales Reps, Forcing New Engagement Practices

Physician-patient engagement has changed rapidly and significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic, with remote conferencing and digital communications becoming increasingly important, according to a new survey of 500 U.S physicians by AbelsonTaylor, a leading health and wellness marketing agency.

The survey also reveals that communications between physicians and sales reps in the pharmaceutical, biotech and medical device industries are changing substantially, in response to alternative information and communications needs.



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Amanda Hartzmark

The AbelsonTaylor Survey queried 500 U.S.-based physicians across nine medical specialties to assess how COVID-19 is affecting the ways they interact with patients and monitor their care as well as how they engage with industry sales reps.

"We conducted this research to quantify how physicians are communicating during this pivotal time so we can anticipate what behaviors may become part of the 'new

normal' after the pandemic, with patients as well as their industry sales reps," said Amanda Hartzmark, senior director of marketing intelligence at AbelsonTaylor. "Although the healthcare industry lags other industries in adopting new technologies and practices, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced rapid changes that may become standard when this subsides."

Remote Conferencing Jumps as Office Visits Plummet

Not surprisingly, social distancing has significantly disrupted contact between physicians and their patients. More than four-fifths (84%) of respondents saw fewer patients in late March, averaging 40 patients per week vs. 103 per week prior to March 2020.

Three-quarters of physicians (75%) began using alternative communication methods not used in the preceding year, driving an average 58% increase in remote conferencing.



Video chatting increased by 159%, with approximately 35% of respondents using it in March vs. just 12% who used it in 2019. Telemedicine saw a 106% uptick in adoption, with more than 40% of physicians saying they used it in March vs. 18% in 2019. New Medicare reimbursement for telehealth likely has facilitated this growth and more than two-thirds of physicians said they were aware of government policy changes expanding telehealth coverage.

Despite the spikes in remote conferencing, telephone calls remained doctors' top choice for keeping in touch with their patients remotely. Nearly 90% of physicians said they relied on this method, greatly surpassing emails, web portals, text messages and other means of exchanging information.

Prescribing Changes

More than a third of physicians (38%) said they had changed their prescribing practices because of COVID-19, with 77% of this group increasing medication quantities, 73% writing prescriptions without an office visit, and 49% reevaluating their patients' prescriptions. 41% expressed heightened concern about patient adherence to their medication schedules.

When asked if they were considering alternative treatment forms to avoid immuno-suppressing their patients, 38% of physicians said "yes." Respondents reported a decrease of 31% for NSAID prescriptions and 29% for steroids when asked about changes in prescribing within specific treatment categories.

Changes Doctors Seek from Industry Reps

The AbelsonTaylor survey found that in late March, when social distancing began in most of the country, physician visits from pharma, biotech and medical device sales reps declined by 63%. Moreover, 83% of respondents said they had not received any new information from industry during that time.

This finding is supported by independent data from Veeva Systems, which shows that face-to-face meetings between physicians and reps dropped by more than 50% between January and March 2020, while emails increased 263% during the same period. Both findings underscore the growing importance of digital engagement.

"According to our findings, doctors want information from industry," Hartzmark says. "Half of survey respondents said they would like to hear from reps at least monthly, with practical information pertinent to the current health crisis and their evolving ways of responding to it." More than two fifths (42%) of respondents said they want treatment protocols for COVID-19 patients, while a similar number (40%) seek digital literature, tools and apps to aid in communicating with their patients.

As for how physicians would like to receive information from industry, more than half said they prefer email notifications. Virtual detailing and website updates were other channels of interest.

Healthcare Marketer Takeaways

Hartzmark believes it's clear that physicians want relevant, easily accessible information, delivered regularly and in digital formats, to help address the current disruption in communication between themselves and their patients. "More than ever, they want to control the flow of information and have key data at their fingertips for immediate reference," she says.

Hartzmark also notes that a lasting legacy of social distancing will be its influence in decreasing barriers to adoption of alternative methods of information transfer, including telemedicine. "This will bring healthcare directly into the homes and on the phones of patients, creating new needs and opportunities."

Lastly, the AbelsonTaylor survey shows that increased digital contact will be an enduring part of the “new normal” between physicians and industry. “Until there is a vaccine, doctors will be extremely cautious about who they allow into their offices, especially those who treat higher-risk patients. They are also learning that they can still be kept abreast of new products, services, clinical trial updates, etc. via digital contact. Going forward, it’s likely that a more blended form of engagement will evolve pretty quickly, combining face-to-face visits with digital communications and leveraging the advantages of both.”

To learn more about the AbelsonTaylor survey and its implications for healthcare marketers, contact Jay Carter, executive vice president and director of business development, at JayCarter@abelsontaylor.com. An infographic of key findings is attached. Access to a webinar describing the full survey is available on request.

About the Survey

“Understanding Physician Engagements in a COVID-19 Impacted World” was designed, analyzed and interpreted by AbelsonTaylor and fielded by global research company Savanta during the week of March 21-28, 2020. Five hundred U.S.-based physicians were interviewed, 100 in family/general practice and 50 each in cardiology, endocrinology, neurology, psychiatry, general surgery, general oncology, ophthalmology, and obstetrics/gynecology.

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