



Standing out through digital patient experience

How Digital Engagement Personalises Care and Builds Patient Loyalty in Elective Healthcare

Martin Mikek, MD | Co-CEO & Co-Founder, Carely Digital

In today's private healthcare market, patients have come to expect clinical competence and modern technology as standard. What increasingly shapes their decisions is the experience of care itself—how they are treated, how clearly information is communicated, and how connected they feel throughout their journey. This paper explores how patient experience has become the most influential factor in patient choice and loyalty, and highlights the role of digital engagement in delivering personalised, empathetic care at scale.

Clinical Outcomes: A Baseline Expectation

Clinical outcomes should not be relied on as a means of differentiation. Patients assume that any reputable provider will deliver safe and effective care, making outcomes a baseline expectation rather than a reason to choose one clinic over another. Most patients are not equipped to assess outcomes objectively and instead judge care based on how they feel throughout the process. A review in *BMJ Open* found that patient choice is driven primarily by communication, empathy, and trust—not technical performance (*Doyle et al., BMJ Open*). Similarly, *BMJ Quality & Safety* reports that most complaints are about service-related issues such as poor communication and staff attitude, rather than clinical errors (*Reader et al., BMJ Quality & Safety*). Studies from *Bain & Company* and *Press Ganey* confirm that patient loyalty and recommendations are shaped more by experience than outcomes. Clinical results are expected—not what sets a provider apart.

Technology: Why Tech Alone Doesn't Set You Apart

Advanced medical technology plays an important role in care delivery, but it should not be relied on as a point of differentiation. Patients expect modern equipment and methods as part of standard care and often assume that any reputable provider has access to the latest tools. Research from The Beryl Institute shows that patients prioritize communication, respect, and being listened to well above the presence of advanced technology when choosing a provider (*The Beryl Institute, 2018*). *Frost & Sullivan* further note that new technologies are rapidly adopted across providers, making them indistinguishable in the eyes of patients and limiting their strategic value. Emphasising technical features can also backfire. Most patients are not equipped to evaluate differences in technology and may feel confused or overwhelmed by complex information. Without a clear connection to their personal experience, technology alone does not build trust or influence choice. What matters is not the tools themselves, but how they are used to support the patient journey.

Patient Experience: The Primary Driver of Choice and Loyalty

Among all factors influencing provider choice in elective healthcare, patient experience stands out as the most decisive. Surveys by The Beryl Institute show that patients value feeling heard, respected, and clearly informed above clinical outcomes or technology (*The Beryl Institute, 2018*). These emotional and interpersonal aspects are what shape trust and loyalty. This is reflected in real-world behavior. A review of over 35,000 online patient reviews found that 96% of negative feedback was related to service issues—such as poor communication, long waits, or unhelpful staff—not medical outcomes (*Reader et al., BMJ Quality & Safety*). *Bain & Company's* healthcare consumer study further confirms that patients who report strong care experiences are significantly more likely to return and recommend the provider (*Bain & Company, 2022*). When clinical quality is assumed and technology is widespread, it is the human experience that defines a provider's identity and drives preference.

Digital Engagement: Enabling Personalised Care at Scale

Digital engagement enables providers to deliver personalised, high-touch care across every stage of the patient journey—at scale. From the first contact, it helps build trust by sharing relevant educational content that sets expectations, reduces uncertainty, and prepares patients for meaningful conversations with their care team. This early support fosters a sense of connection and confidence before the first appointment even takes place. As care progresses, digital tools continue to enrich the experience by delivering timely, individualised communication—such as reminders, procedure instructions, follow-up guidance, and wellness check-ins. These messages can be delivered through email, text, video, or voice, and tailored to the patient's condition, treatment path, or level of engagement. The result is a smoother, more coordinated care experience that reduces friction, improves adherence, and keeps patients informed and involved at every step. This level of personalised communication supports not only convenience and accessibility, but also emotional reassurance. Patients feel seen, supported, and empowered to participate in decisions about their care. For providers, this translates into stronger patient relationships, improved satisfaction, and a clear differentiator in a competitive market.

In today's elective healthcare market, elevating the patient experience is the most effective way to stand out. As clinical quality and technology become standard expectations, it is the care experience that drives patient choice and loyalty. Digital patient engagement is one of the most efficient ways to achieve this—enabling providers to deliver empathy, clarity, and connection at scale.

