



Point of care evolution and innovation in the time of COVID-19

By Victoria Summers

Introduction


COVID-19 has ushered in an unprecedented set of challenges for our country's healthcare systems. In addition to the strain placed on hospitals and physicians at the front line of caring for those infected with the virus, the experience of delivering care for non-infected patients has changed as well. The highly contagious nature of the virus has required healthcare centers to dramatically alter their practice workflow, patient traffic management and delivery of care. This crisis has changed the of the point of care experience for many patients in different ways.

It's never been more important for point of care patient and healthcare professional marketing and education to be effectively delivered in a responsible, safe, flexible and relevant way. The Point of Care Communication Council (PoC3) and its member companies are dedicated to partnering with healthcare providers and treatment manufacturers to meet their changing needs. As a member of the PoC3, we are pleased to provide this update on how point of care companies are responding to this situation and how they are evolving and enhancing offerings now and into the future.

In the past month, we interviewed 13 point of care company leaders to find out how companies are responding to COVID-19. Leaders across the country report that many physician practices are open and seeing patients. The notable exceptions are offices providing elective services, such as dentistry and aesthetics. "We are only seeing a small number of practices temporarily closing," said David Kenyon, CEO of CoverWrap Communications. "Most are reducing hours and postponing elective procedures and nonessential healthcare visits to protect patients and providers."

Even though offices are open, patient visits are notably down. A [ZS study](#) conducted in late April found that patient visit volumes were down 40 to 50% depending on the therapeutic area. Point of care companies report this reduction in visit volume has been accompanied by a rapid move to telemedicine, which has increased engagement with mobile and digital point of care platforms. "We're seeing a significant shift to telemedicine among our pediatrics and primary care practices," said David Linetsky, SVP of life sciences for Phreesia. "Our content delivery has always been digital, so we've been able to adjust. We now deliver content on a patient's mobile device versus in-office devices."

For the offices that are open and seeing patients, the demand for point of care content is higher than ever before. Point of care companies have been working hard to respond to this demand – innovating, partnering and focusing their rapid response efforts. In addition, with pharma field sales representatives pulled out of



the office, many pharma brands are turning to point of care to get their messages to healthcare professionals.

In our study, we identified three trends impacting point of care marketing and education in the time of COVID-19:

Trend 1: Customized content

Companies across the point of care industry worked quickly to develop COVID-19 education and prevention content. “The vast majority of offices are open and want the content even more now,” said Mike Collette, founder and CEO of PatientPoint. Most point of care companies we spoke with are working around the clock to create educational content and partner with health organizations. Constant Media worked with the Red Cross to spur blood donation in affected areas. CheckedUp partnered with Health Data to create educational materials for a wide range of topics for patients, including how to wash hands, how to wear a face mask and how to avoid transmission. Health Media Network partnered with local news outlets to develop in-office content about local social distancing restrictions. Mesmerize partnered with Ad Council and the CDC to create COVID-19 prevention posters.

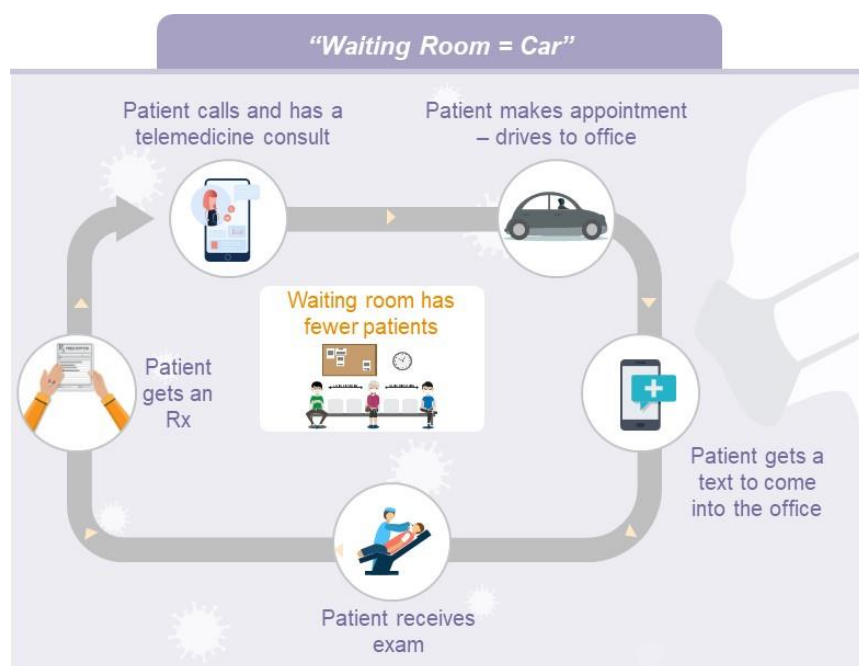
Customized content is also being offered to practices during the crisis. “We took our weekly newsletter to a daily format and focused on COVID-specific content aligned with each type of specialty practice we serve,” said Greg Jackson, CEO of Physicians Weekly.

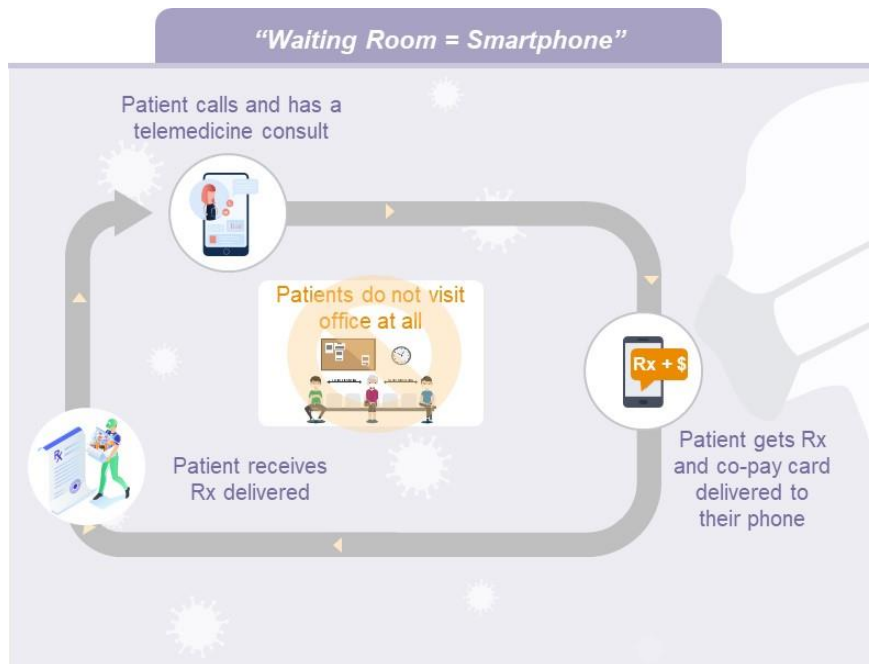
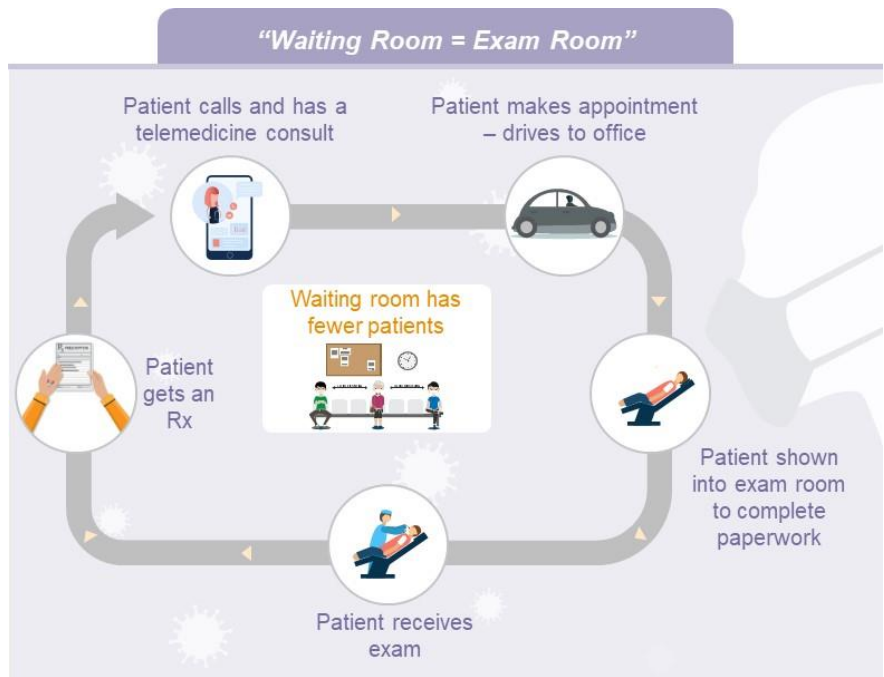
PatientPoint created COVID-19 templated content that physicians can tailor for their practices. Practices can customize the information to reflect their own HIPAA regulations, sterilization practices and other virus practice concerns. Health Media Network also provides custom options for practices weaving together HMN-produced COVID-19 content with practice or health-system specific information. Physicians Weekly created condition-specific microsites where targeted physicians can get information about the treatment of underlying conditions for COVID-19 patients. OFX Media Group is investing in technology with the rollout of a new cloud-based platform providing greater campaign and content management options for practices.

Trend 2: Digital and mobile amplification

Practices are now splitting waiting areas into sections to isolate suspected COVID-19 infected patients from others, implementing social distancing and revising the patient flow to make sure patients don't risk infection. Because of the change in office patient flow, both patient-oriented content and healthcare professional-targeted marketing and education have shifted to digital and mobile. Physicians Weekly reports that content engagement rates, particularly on email and mobile, have gone up 30 to 40% among physicians. With many pharma representatives no longer in the field, more non-personal promotional (NPP) efforts through channels like Physicians Weekly's emails are seeing increased use.


There are several new patterns of patient intake and flow. Sometimes, patients come in, check in and then go back to their cars and get a text from the office that an exam room is ready. In other practices, patients are shown to an exam room to wait after being checked in. In still other practices, a separate waiting area has been set up for patients experiencing symptoms of COVID-19. Point of care companies report that wherever patients are in the office, they're reluctant to touch anything they believe may have been touched by an infected patient.





In response, point of care companies are advancing a variety of digital and mobile solutions. These include autoplay for screens and devices that were designed to encourage touch screen engagement. “We’ve implemented hands-free options for all our touchscreens,” said Wills Robbins, founder of Constant Media.

QR codes are also being used to move that engagement from the in-office touchscreen to the patient’s own device. Patient Point uses QR codes on all of its print and digital content so patients can review information on their smartphones. RxEDGE Media Network added QR codes and augmented reality



functions to content so patients just need to hold up the camera on their smartphone to access information — no need to touch information packets. “We’re changing our programs to adapt and that means thinking differently about how patients engage in content,” said Nathan Lucht, president of RxEDGE Media Network.

Remedy Health Media is providing sealed printed materials that patients can take with them versus materials that may have been touched by many patients. Targeted Media Health and CoverWrap Communications are both encouraging patients to take custom publications with them versus leaving them in the office. Health Monitor Network is accustomed to physicians distributing its publications directly to patients in exam rooms, but is also leveraging its patient database of condition sufferers to conduct special mailings of patient education guides. “Clients want to reach more patients at home, so we are mailing them directly to patients,” said Ken Freirich, CEO of Health Monitor Network.


Nearly all point of care companies offering printed materials are exploring ways to support digital engagement with their content. “We have been rethinking how patients can interact with content in the waiting room and exploring ways to get content into patient hands, especially in those cases where patients have concerns about having to touch the publications,” said John Kenyon, vice president and managing director at Targeted Media Health.

Innovating in telehealth

Telehealth in particular is driving increased digital innovation among point of care companies. The channel has seen dramatic growth during the COVID-19 crisis. Before the crisis, 62% of telehealth visits were [made by patients less than 65 years old](#). Just one week after the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services relaxed restrictions and cost-sharing on telehealth policies, telemedicine visits grew by 400% across all age groups in the U.S., [most dramatically for those 65 and older](#).

New digital telehealth tools are being developed to meet the demands at the point of care. Phreesia developed a screening model according to CDC guidelines that identifies exposure risk and new symptoms before patients show up at the office. The company rolled out this digital solution in February and March and saw fast uptake. Innovation in point of care is coming from companies pivoting their entire organization to work on COVID-19 tools to help practices.

One notable example of innovation spurred by the COVID-19 crisis is the development and launch of a new telemedicine platform from the fully digital point of care company CheckedUp. The Virtual Visits telemedicine platform is proprietary to



CheckedUp and combines a HIPAA compliant experience with video communications and interactive digital technologies traditionally only found in the physicians' office. Virtual Visits by CheckedUp is designed to replicate the patient journey and the specialist consultation in-office experience.

“Most telehealth platforms are focused on enabling communication, but we think advanced telemedicine can facilitate a remote medical consultation with deeper education,” said Richard M. Awdeh, MD, CEO of the company. Working entirely in a remote perspective, the CheckedUp leadership, tech, and development teams sought direct input from the dedicated physician members in their specialty verticals to drive the creation of the Virtual Visits telemedicine platform.

The Virtual Visit platform includes features that can be used at home or on the go and for use while in the office, or in a parking lot outside of an office. Recognizing that some patients will still need to be seen physically, the platform is designed to provide a patient intake experience while the patient waits in their vehicle or outside the office. “We see this as a solution to keep patients safe in this COVID-19 crisis, but also beyond COVID,” Awdeh stated.

Virtual Visits features The Virtual Waiting Room, delivering reputable and relevant content and branded digital advertising to patients while they wait for their consultation to begin. All the educational content is tailored to each patient's condition and preferences. The same type of patient education and branded messaging follows the patient from The Virtual Waiting Room to The Virtual Exam Room, and features several opportunities on the screen throughout the patient's consultation with the dedicated specialist they know and trust.

Nearly all the companies we interviewed for this report are working on ways to integrate their content with telehealth platforms and environments. Many healthcare professionals are using FaceTime and Zoom to connect with patients and point of care companies are developing digital materials that integrate into EMR to help physicians share information with patients over email and text. “The point of care communication industry will need to evolve and we need to meet patients and providers where they are: telehealth, zero-contact workflows, exam room, wherever,” said Linetsky.



Trend 3: Integration across the care continuum

The last trend we noted from our interviews was the way point of care content is being extended beyond the physician's office and into other healthcare spaces, such as the pharmacy, community centers, labs and telemedicine.

"We've also been focusing on underserved communities – facilities providing medical, counseling and social services like food and housing. With the increase in unemployment, these organizations are crucial. We launched TV screens in these facilities during the past six months, so we have been able to get information into these areas quickly," said Craig Mait, president and chief revenue officer of Mesmerize.

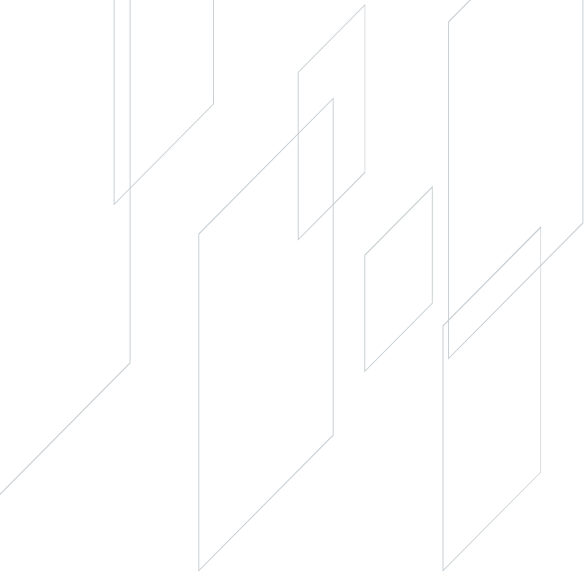
RxEDGE Media Network tracks increased traffic at the pharmacy where they are placing more messages. ARAG panel data shows pharmacy traffic is up 6.5% year over year in the last six weeks ending March 24, 2020. There are many opportunities to reach patients with educational materials when they go to the pharmacy to stock up on their medications. With downloadable videos and savings coupons, patients can get information in the doctor's office and take it with them on their smartphone to the pharmacy to pick up their prescription. In the pharmacy, patients can register for adherence and support programs via QR codes printed on the prescription bag.

Point of care companies are developing digital and downloadable information to engage patients and healthcare professionals across care settings. These digital options supported by print and out-of-home materials help patients access information safely. Several point of care member companies are developing sterilized printed kits and materials, and patient welcome kits for treatments are being packaged germ-free.

Several respondents predicted increased involvement of mail order and delivery services, making the home the new point of care. "In the future, I believe we'll see an increased ability to do lab testing by mail. We do genetic testing by mail, and I predict we'll see COVID-19 testing by mail soon," said Carlo DiMarco, EVP of corporate development at Health Media Network. "There will be increased innovation in a variety of areas. This industry is one of the most innovative and complex. We'll see amazing leaps forward from this crisis."

Conclusion

There is little doubt that COVID-19 has changed the face of health care in our country forever. Not only has it amplified the shift to virtual care and remote monitoring and driven the growth of telemedicine, but COVID-19 has also shifted the way patients



and healthcare professionals are engaging with content across the healthcare system.

Throughout this dynamically changing climate, point of care companies are hard at work improvising, supporting and innovating to adapt and ensure that high-quality patient and healthcare professional content reach those who need it. Many companies we spoke with reported increases in physician office requests for technology and solutions. Point of care companies are continuing to expand their networks, onboarding new office sites on off-hours and over the weekend to respond safely to increased demand. Point of care companies are ready to adapt and continue to deliver relevant treatment and health content anywhere and everywhere consumers need it.

About the Authors



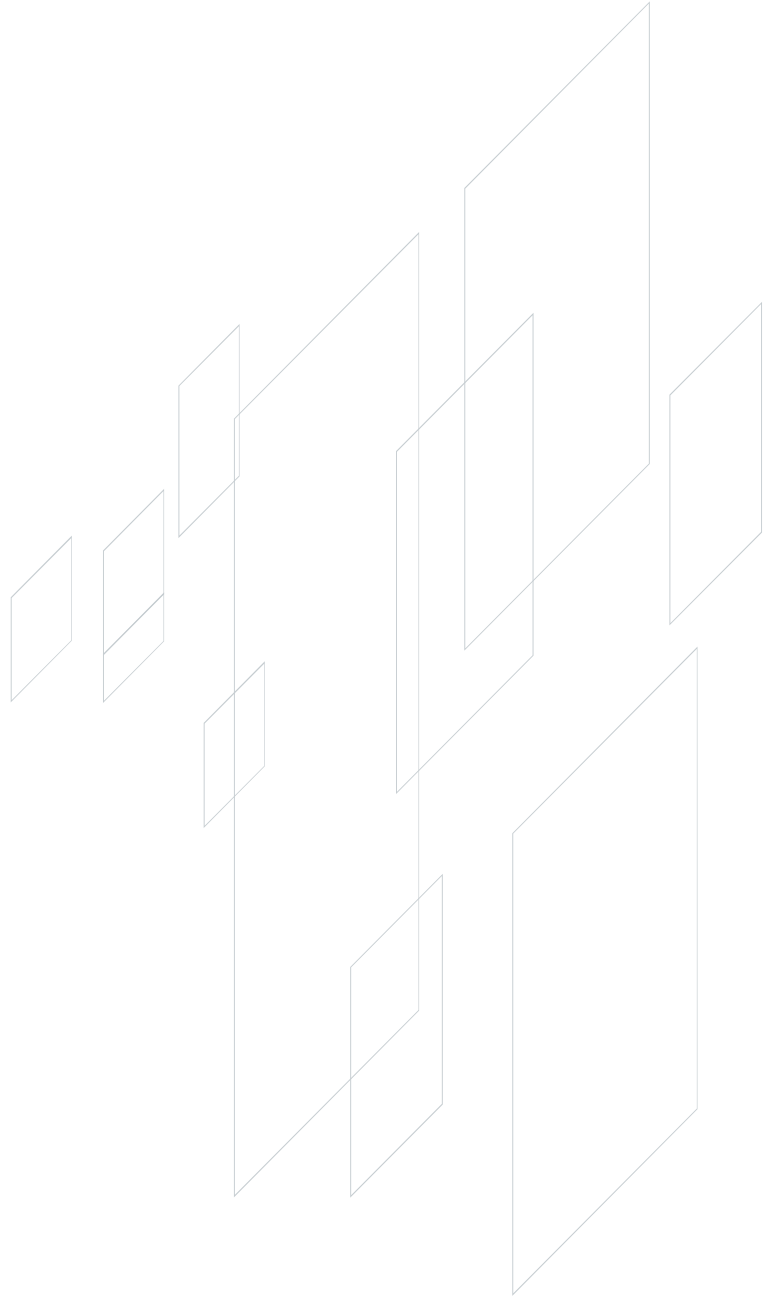
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About ZS

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About PoC3

The Point of Care Communication Council was founded in 2013 by forward-thinking POC leaders to advocate for the effective use of the point of care channel to advance health and health care outcomes. To learn more, visit www.poc3.org.



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