



## HEALTHCARE

HOW TO IMPROVE PATIENT EXPERIENCE AND OPERATIONAL  
EFFICIENCY USING CUSTOMER FLOW MANAGEMENT  
METHODOLOGIES

A QMATIC WHITEPAPER

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# Abstract

When improving the patient experience, the patient and his or her entire journey have to be in focus, especially in a multidiscipline environment like an Outpatient Clinic. From entry, reception through to treatment and back, all parts of the patient journey are important, and not just the medical procedures. This white paper describes the challenges of healthcare from a patient experience and patient journey perspective and possible solutions. This whitepaper does not discuss the medical procedures and its impact.

Qmatic has been in the service to great customer experiences for more than 30 years. Our solutions, systems and knowhow have also been applied to the Healthcare industry all over the world where the focus is to improve patient experiences and operational efficiency with the methodology Patient Flow Management (PFM) that was invented by us.

Solutions with Patient Experience Management (PEM) and the methodology Patient Flow Management (PFM) assist hospitals, clinics, pharmacies, etc. around the globe to reduce costs while offering better service.

# Introduction

Healthcare facilities of all types are under enormous pressure to provide an improved quality of care while coping with limited available resources. Spending cutbacks and a growing number of patients are driving the need for efficiency gains as well as revenue increase for clinics and hospitals. Add to this a clear focus on not only maintaining the patient experience on an acceptable level – but improving it – and you will get an equation pretty hard to solve.

The processes in patient care are very complex. The involvement of multiple departments, services and steps results in the patient dealing with a range of hospitals and resources through the course of their treatment. If their movement from one service to another is not well managed or communicated, the patient can be left feeling overwhelmed, lost and frustrated. The sheer number of resources and departments involved in patient care inevitably lead to bottlenecks and bottlenecks will soon mount up to costly inefficiencies. This wastes taxpayer's money, the time of medical staff and lets patients down.

Efficient processes and good clinical outcomes are critical components of a patient's experience, but these alone are not enough to achieve an excellent experience. Experience is also determined by the physical environment patients are in and how they feel about the care they receive, including the way staff interacts with them.

Improving the experiences of all patients starts by treating each of the patients individually to ensure they receive the right care, at the right time, in the right way for them.

The drive to deliver a good experience for all patients is of course not a new concept. However, a commitment to making all experiences excellent is still not widespread and change is sometimes slow. A widely held belief is also that providing good patient experiences is 'nice but not necessary' or 'nice but too expensive'. That perception is however changing, and in many regions changing rapidly, as patients have options in their choice of healthcare provider.

“84% of healthcare leaders rank Patient Experience as a top priority.”  
*Care Transition Journal*

# Healthcare Challenges

Patients have more choices in how, when and where they receive care today. Simply put, they are prepared to walk away from clinics if their expectations are not met, i.e. to a chemist/pharmacy for non-urgent care as well as to another clinic. In a recent survey<sup>1</sup>, 34% of patients said they would change their habits based on their experience. After all, “Why should I settle for mediocre care? I have options today that I didn’t have before.”

So let’s take a closer look at the challenges facing hospitals and clinics today.

From experience gained over the years, we have identified four key challenges facing Healthcare providers today.

- (1) Enhancing patient experience
- (2) Improving operational efficiency
- (3) Improving utilisation of resources and facilities
- (4) Retaining staff

So, how can Customer Experience Management (CEM) and Patient Flow Management (PFM) solutions and methodologies turn these challenges into opportunities – enhancing the patient experience, while improving the bottom line?



Fig 1. Understanding and managing the customer journey is key in delivering improved patient experience in healthcare.

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<sup>1</sup> PricewaterhouseCoopers

# Meeting the challenges

## CHALLENGE 1: ENHANCING PATIENT EXPERIENCE

65% of patient's rate waiting times in clinics as unsatisfactory

Having to go to a hospital or a clinic because of a medical issue is a stressful situation in itself. Patients are worried, anxious and sometimes in pain. Making the visit as secure, relaxed and comfortable as possible is important to achieving a positive patient experience. The way nurses and physicians



communicate, waiting times, the waiting room atmosphere, privacy and the process itself are some of the factors that affect the patient's overall experience as much as the actual medical procedure. Every step in the patient journey affects the experience of the patient.

So how can applying PFM help you improve the patient experience?

Recent studies<sup>2</sup> show that up to 65% of patient's rate waiting times in clinics as unsatisfactory. The concern is of course that this waiting will result in patient dissatisfaction with the visit as a whole.

So, finding ways to reduce waiting time is important. With the right approach, taking both actual and perceived waiting time into consideration, you can enhance the patient experience.



A solution can help reduce the actual waiting time for patients by steering them to less busy hours of the day. This can for example be achieved with a calendar booking system, allowing you to efficiently schedule appointments. This system should be integrated to the Hospital Information System (HIS).

A booking solution streamlines the patient flow and makes it more efficient – making the patient experience pleasant. In addition, the solution offers real time monitoring and resource planning of staff, and alerts hospital managers when service level targets are not achieved so that they can take actions accordingly. All of this, to reduce actual waiting time and enhance the patient experience.

The longest wait is the one you cannot control – especially as a patient. PFM methodology can reduce the perceived waiting time by using media solutions in the waiting area to present hospital information and entertainment, for example.

<sup>2</sup> McCarthy, McGee, & O'Boyle

Waiting is also more acceptable and feels shorter if it is calm, fair, explained and logical. A virtual queuing solution that allows patients to sit down and relax, tells them where they are in the process, and clearly informs them when it is their turn, will enhance the patient experience.

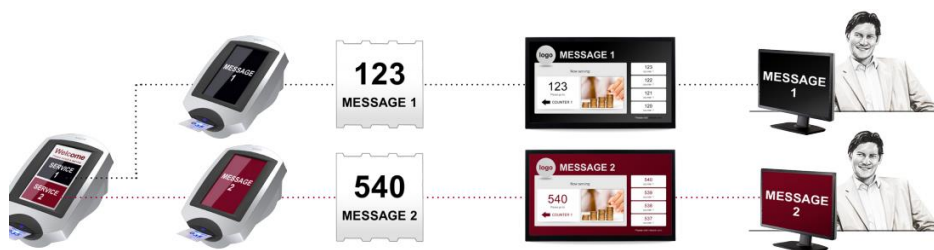


Fig 2. Qmatic Patient Journey gives control of all the surfaces in the clinic and not just the big screens on the wall as typical Digital Signage suppliers

A hospital pharmacy reduced waiting time from 2 hours to 15 minutes resulting in happier customers.

A virtual queuing solution can also fulfill patients' privacy requirements by identifying patients as soon as they enter the waiting area, giving them a unique identity number that allows clinicians to call patients by ticket number instead of by name. This information can also be displayed in text messaging solutions and Smartphone apps. The solution also helps you comply with several known regulations concerning patient privacy (e.g. HIPPA in the US)

## CHALLENGE 2: IMPROVING OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

Outpatient Clinics have a lot in common with other healthcare providers like your house doctor or a blood lab (phlebotomy) or even the dentist. But there are also important differences. Outpatient Clinics are multidiscipline, meaning that there are often several different procedures involved in one patient visit. All of these procedures have to be coordinated to ensure a smooth and efficient operation.

From admissions to treatment rooms, knowing who your patients are, why they are there and where they are at all times is a key to reducing wasted time between treatments. A solution direct patient to the right service point at the right time and as a result streamlines the patient flow. For example, a nurse or receptionist no longer needs to walk to the waiting area to let a patient know that it is his or her turn to be seen. This will increase efficiency by allowing staff to focus on more value added activities. A solution also makes it possible to track patients throughout the treatment process, which simplifies co-ordination.

You can also implement a calendar booking system to steer patients to less busy hours. The number of patients visiting the clinic becomes more predictable, allowing for better planning of resources so that more clinical time can be spent with individual patients – improving quality of care. You can achieve this by implementing a Qmatic calendar booking system or by integrating with an existing system using standard HL7 protocol.

Even when it's possible to book appointments, there is often the problem of patients who do not show up for their appointments. As much as 10-12% of

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appointments in a clinic are cancelled and up to 35% of all appointments made by patients are rescheduled. Implementing a solution makes it easier to see/treat walk-in patients when scheduled patients do not arrive (DNA) – improving efficiency substantially.

Reception desks are in many cases overstaffed and costly bottlenecks. By directing patients to an automated reception system (patient self check-in) you reduce the cost of low value tasks on administrative staff by enabling patients to check in themselves. A solution can reduce the frontline staff costs by as much as 25%.

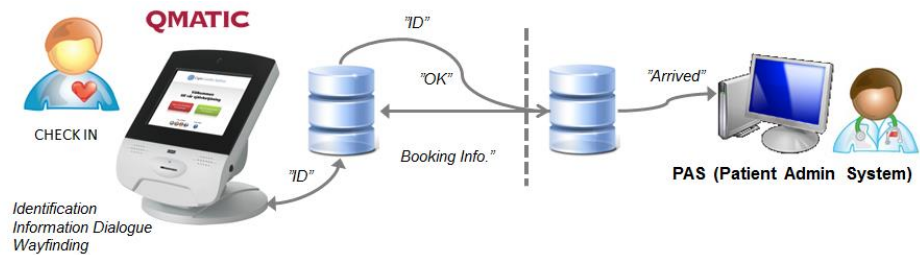


Fig 3. Qmatic Patient Self Check-In solutions bring multiple benefits to an Healthcare organisation. It empowers patients and streamlines operations.

When it comes to care giving, information is a key to speed. With a solution you can reduce treatment time by informing the clinician about the patient’s need before the patient enters the treatment room, the x-ray or blood lab. This “head start” allows the clinic to treat more patients.

The access to MI (Management Information) from a solution such as footfall, waiting time, treatment time, will provide information about true performance. For example, seasonal variation can be forecast using historical data to predict future trends, allowing you to increase capacity at key times to prevent increases in waiting time. Benchmarking between departments or staff can also be done to drive operational improvement.

### CHALLENGE 3: IMPROVING UTILISATION OF RESOURCES AND FACILITIES

Mobile apps and online appointments even outs patient flow and avoid queuing and on-site waiting.



Whether it is the space used for waiting patients, the consultation rooms or reception workstations, they are all represent precious resources that need to be managed carefully in order to be efficient and effectively used to best serve your patients.

Through our in depth studies of clinic departments, we have seen examples where on average usage of consultation rooms is as low as 22%, in waiting rooms/areas as low as 18% and at reception workstations as low as 33%. This is probably not uncommon.

With a solution, you can free more space for patient treatment rooms, for example, by reducing the total waiting area. Instead of having several local waiting areas – which adds up to a lot of space, you can combine them into one larger, centralised

waiting area. The solution is then used to guide patients, informing them when it is their turn and where to go.

With a solution you have flexible usage of consultation rooms and workstations based on the needs of the patients and staff availability and profile. A solution will guide patients efficiently to the right place in the right time. You will also be able to measure your facility usage and, based on the data, take action and make short, medium and long-term improvements.

## CHALLENGE 4: RETAINING STAFF

As healthcare institutions around the world are experiencing a growing workforce shortage, the challenge is to not only attract skilled staff, but retain them.

A solution can increase staff job satisfaction by making sure that the right patient is at the right place at the right time, contributing to a more comfortable and relaxed workplace. Satisfied patients are usually more friendly toward clinicians, contributing to a more positive workday.

A solution also contributes to a sense of professionalism since it gives employees knowledge about the patients waiting, and better matches employee competence with the patient's need. Staff can take pride in knowing that they are informed and ready to meet the patient's requirements and provide the best possible service.



In addition, staff is supported by real time monitoring and resource planning that alerts hospital managers when service level targets are not being achieved so that they can take actions accordingly.



# Results / Conclusion

The wrong PFM solution can be worse than having no solution at all. Qmatic has implemented more than 10 000 healthcare solutions worldwide, across 122 countries, giving us a unique knowledge and insight into how best to offer our clients tangible improvements and measureable results. Below are a few examples, based on real cases, of what healthcare clients have achieved with our solutions.



- Leading hospital automates 25-30% of reception desk tasks 26% reduction in frontline staff costs for outpatient clinic
- 10 % savings in staff due to less walking for nurses in hospital
- 25 % increase in productivity (registration and admission)- outpatient clinic
- 70% decrease in actual waiting time, to a mere 5 minutes - hospital
- 95% of patients were satisfied with the improvements made by the new Qmatic solution
- A hospital pharmacy reduces waiting time from 2 hours to 15 minutes
- Hospital reduces walking time resulting in 10% FTE (Full Time Employee) savings
- Outpatient lab cuts turnaround time from 27 to 13 minutes for blood tests
- 24% reduction in waiting areas required
- Hospital serves 3% more patients in the same floor space

# About Qmatic

”There is only one boss - the customer. And he can fire everyone from the chairman down, simply by spending his money somewhere else”.  
Sam Walton, 1977

Qmatic’s vision is to realize the full potential of every meeting. We help our clients engage and interact with their customers from the very first touch point. We gather information around the customer journey and help create brand value from improved customer experiences. By creating a seamless customer journey from online channels through to face-to-face meetings, we increase customer experiences and strengthen our clients’ brands.

Qmatic holds a market leading positions in the public sector, financial services, retail, and healthcare applications and it is estimated that more than a quarter of the world’s population pass through a Qmatic system every year.

Qmatic has a truly global footprint and operates in over 120 countries through own subsidiaries and partner network. The Qmatic Group has a turnover of EUR 60 million and employs some 300 people. The company’s main owners are Altor Fund II GP Limited and ICG.

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