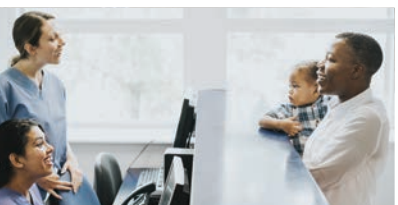
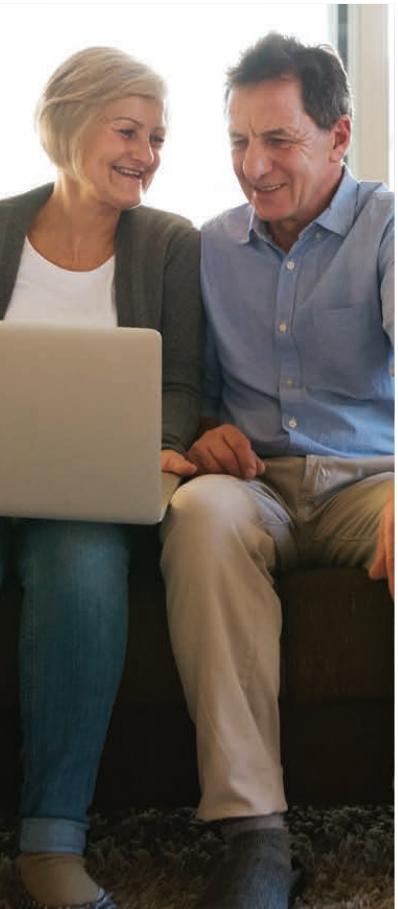


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# Healthcare's Digital Front Door – A Win for Everyone

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***“Customer experience is more important than ever—yet it has never been more challenging as companies face a perfect storm of increasing call volumes, talent shortages, and rising customer expectations.”***

***– McKinsey & Company***



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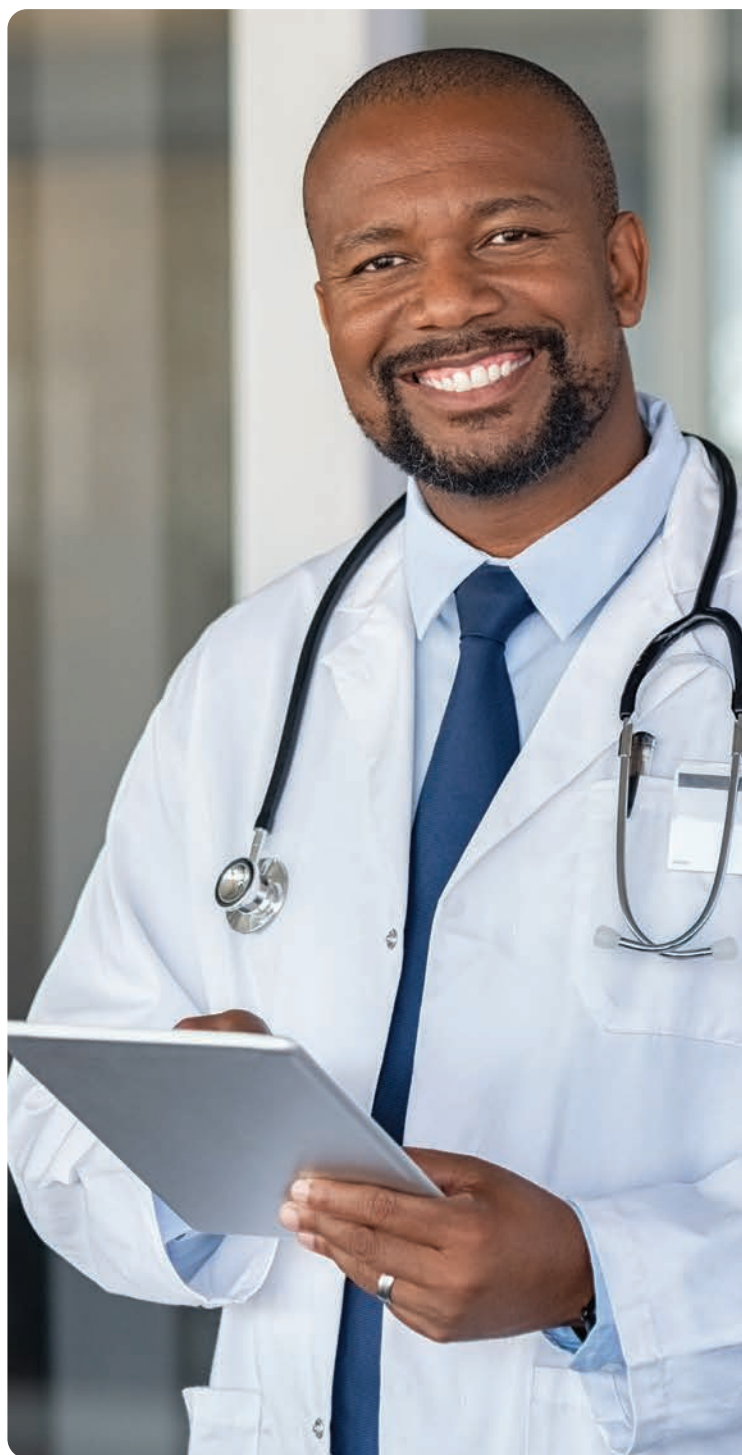
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## The Mandate for a Digital Front Door

Most would agree with McKinsey & Company's "2022 State of Customer Care Survey," which sums up today's healthcare challenges as a "perfect storm."<sup>1</sup> McKinsey's survey reports that customer care is a strategic focus for healthcare organizations. Respondents said that their top three priorities over the next 12 to 24 months are retaining and developing the best people, driving a simplified customer experience while reducing call volumes and costs, and building their digital care and advanced analytics ecosystems.

Yet staffing shortages and sheer demand overwhelm providers and distract them from creating their own digital front door strategy and realizing the benefits it can provide to the organization. As of December 23, 2022, across the country, and especially in California, healthcare workers report patient volumes that rival the heights of the pandemic.<sup>2</sup> Healthcare employees are unhappy bearing the brunt of converging COVID-19, influenza and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) pandemics. These illnesses that are rapidly spreading require a higher level of care from more nurses and support staff.

Against the backdrop of rising inflation and economic uncertainty, these existing forces are intensifying healthcare's focus to find innovative technologies that offset the exodus of talent. But defining what exactly "the front door" is and how it can address today's challenges evades most organizations, which are taking only small steps to integrate in-person and virtually enabled care models.





Additionally, though the body of evidence regarding the value of virtual care has grown substantially, many organizations narrowly focus their digital approaches on short-term measures instead of long-term value.

It is true that virtual healthcare care services can offer instant flexibility and adaptability for meaningful connection, which is key to managing the crisis to run a busy and profitable practice. Waiting too long to play catch up will only make work life harder for everyone to meet staff needs and customer demand.

Virtual healthcare solutions will help address staffing shortages while improving patient experience, care capacity and retention. We share real-life use cases that demonstrate where “going digital” generated tangible value and is good for both the consumer and the U.S. healthcare system.

Led by forward-thinking healthcare leaders, these programs are also scaling up to accommodate a wider range of clinical care and chronic condition needs, representing a shift to long-term value creation.

## What is a Digital Front Door?

The digital front door is a virtual means for consumers to interact with a health system or hospital, integrated with in-person services, whether the consumer is present or not in the facility. A true digital front door moves past today’s fragmented services to create a

cohesive and holistic experience for the consumer, setting the foundation for adoption of virtual communication.

The term “consumer” is interchangeable with “customer”. We acknowledge growing consumerism where individuals increasingly expect a convenient, customer-centric experience with a menu of choices to receive care outside of traditional delivery models.

## Acquiring a Digital-first, Organization-wide Mindset

Adopting a virtual care delivery model that effectively integrates the right level of digital technology requires a deep understanding of how to address the patient’s needs through a combination of technology, workflow and governance changes. The model encompasses both pull and push actions, the first being patient-initiated with the latter health system-driven. Both serve to connect, defragment and streamline the patient journey, making it easier to conduct business with the health system.

It is important to note that the digital front door goes far beyond creating a portal. Rather, it is a digital-first, organization-wide mindset to address rising consumer expectations for convenience and simplicity. Digital enablement or intelligent automation requires **looking at and connecting the experience from the consumer’s perspective, anticipating and**

**responding to what they need** instead of focusing on the specific tasks healthcare staff (clinic, labs, etc.) must complete to provide care.

## Benefits of a Digital-assisted Journey

Here are examples of how one set of digital interactions can improve the patient experience and deliver operational, staffing and financial results.

Healthcare/Staff Benefits	Patient Benefits
Increase patient visits and associated revenue	Maintain health
Improve performance on gaps in care metrics	Convenient access
Reduce office staff time and effort	Unhurried preparation
Reduce no shows	Helpful reminders
Improve patient throughput	Optimize health literacy
	Personalized experience

## Why You Should Implement a Digital Front-door Strategy

The evidence is clear that AI-powered programs, implemented across inpatient, ambulatory and post-acute care settings, already have a strong track record of proven results. Early adopters are realizing tangible growth with measurable outcomes, not the least of which are operational and staffing improvements, and financial gains.

We will examine healthcare’s top concerns, how a range of innovative, digitally enabled strategies are making a difference, and the emergence of entirely new patient care and business models. While the goal with AI is to simplify the provider and consumer experience, the benefits are much greater, resulting in higher patient satisfaction and quality of care, while reducing staff burden and costs and helping to create a high-performance, caring culture.

## Helping to Curb Healthcare Staff Shortages

The ongoing impact of the COVID-19 endemic has intensified worker burnout and contributed to the Great Resignation. This has resulted in critical staffing shortages across the healthcare industry – and little relief is in sight. Staff shortage challenges are “the nation’s top safety concern.”<sup>3</sup>

- **High healthcare worker turnover persists.** U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics employment estimates that the healthcare sector has lost nearly half a million workers since February 2020.<sup>4</sup>



**"48% of healthcare workers are concerned about their health system's ability to retain and hire staff if they do not prioritize automation"<sup>11</sup>**



*Listen to how First Choice Neurology provided critical relief to physicians and staff*

- **Pain of labor loss spans all healthcare sectors:** Inpatient, community clinics, ambulatory practices and medical specialties, and post-acute settings all are experiencing staffing shortages.<sup>5-6</sup>

- **Pain of labor loss impacts all types of healthcare staff.** Nurses, pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, office staff, contact center and other healthcare staff feel the strain of workloads that are affecting the quality of care.
  - In a letter sent in March to the House Energy and Commerce Committee, the American Hospital Association called the workforce shortage hospitals were experiencing a "national emergency," projecting the overall shortage of nurses to reach 1.1 million by the end of the year.<sup>7</sup>
  - Pharmacy staff members who remain are stretched thin. Approximately 61.2% of pharmacists report experiencing a high level of burnout in practice, making it one of the highest rates among healthcare professionals.<sup>8</sup>
  - Annual average employee turnover rate for call centers is 30-45%.<sup>9</sup>
  - A new study finds that low-wage healthcare workers such as nursing assistants, home and personal care aides are leaving the profession at higher rates than before the pandemic.<sup>10</sup>

A "State of Automation 2022 Report," a national survey of 1,000 American healthcare professionals, reported on average that respondents said staff at their organization spend 57.5% of their time on repetitive tasks such as data entry and documentation.<sup>11</sup>

Employee burnout emerged as a top concern: 57% of respondents said they are worried they will burn out due to the number of repetitive tasks or documentation required in their role.

Indeed, with fewer clinicians and staffing challenges at a national emergency tipping point, workable digital solutions are a viable way to help revitalize and provide relief to overwhelmed healthcare workers to immediately:

- **Offload heavy staff workloads with virtual self-scheduling.** Contact center agents can alleviate caller frustrations by providing convenient self-service options to divert routine, administrative calls – such as making or canceling an appointment – to an AI-powered digital experience.
- **Implement digital intake.** Enabling patients to verify insurance forms for preapproval and sign consents digitally before they arrive for a clinic appointment or before a staff member arrives for a home healthcare appointment saves precious staff time and speeds up patient throughput.



First Choice Neurology, the largest U.S. private practice neurology group throughout South Florida, applied this approach to fully automate patient intake at smaller clinics. QliqSOFT's digital strategy proved so successful that First Choice Neurology eliminated the need for an FTE position.<sup>12</sup>



First Choice Neurology implemented digital self-service to empower its patients to perform routine activities online, including scheduling appointments, completing insurance forms for pre-approval, and accessing test results at home or any location at their convenience. They also initiated medical chatbots to consult their doctors or other clinicians about pre- and post-visit clinical concerns and outcomes. The results – **an 18% decrease in overtime while improving clinic revenue by 10–15%.**<sup>22</sup>

**“...It also reduced our overtime by 18% while improving clinic revenue by 10–15%.”**

Jose Rocha, Director of Corporate Business Office Performance  
Medical Management at First Choice Neurology

## Attract and Retain Patients Wherever They Are

Today's consumer is accustomed to digital engagement in other aspects of their life and now expects this as part of clinical care. Patients are smarter, more skeptical, and have more options in healthcare than ever before. In today's pandemic-affected world, their expectations have shifted to expecting seamless transactions and engagement online. Here are examples of what matters to them:

- **Patient preferences matter.** Patients are increasingly shopping around for other providers to meet their needs and the factors influencing their choices are often complicated.<sup>13</sup> Case in point: 43% of Millennials compared to 20% of Baby Boomers are likely to switch practices in the next few years.<sup>14</sup> Paying attention to generational differences is important for patient retention.
- **Subpar customer service is unacceptable.** Half of surveyed patients feel that there is a major need for improvement in customer service and support offered by most healthcare organizations.<sup>15</sup>
- **Long wait times.** Not surprisingly, incessantly waiting on hold is the No. 1 reason for customer dissatisfaction.<sup>16</sup> Research shows 44% of people report being annoyed, irritated, or angry if forced to hold for 5 to 15 minutes. In fact, organizations still schedule 88% of healthcare appointments via phone calls.<sup>17</sup>
- **Declining patient outreach.** Consumers' expectations of Amazon-level convenience are disrupting fundamental parts of care delivery.<sup>18</sup> Personalized, proactive outreach that automates interactions between episodes is a differentiator.



“We learned that meeting patients when, where, and how they want to receive care is the foundation of quality virtual care, especially the use of chatbots.”

Angela Skrzynski, D.O., clinical lead for the urgent care telehealth, COVID remote patient monitoring and Care after COVID programs at Virtua Health



## Virtua Health’s Digital Transformation Journey Improving the Patient Experience

Virtua Health is a nonprofit, comprehensive community healthcare system with five hospitals, seven urgent care centers, and 280-plus locations across southern New Jersey and Philadelphia, supporting more than one million patient encounters annually.<sup>19</sup>

Like many health institutions nationwide, COVID-19 prompted Virtua to launch consumer-facing patient engagement solutions to manage the outbreak more proactively. At the same time, patients expected Virtua Health to deliver the same convenient, consumer-friendly digital capabilities they have become accustomed to in other aspects of their lives. Patients also wanted to engage with their providers online quickly and conveniently.

The health system’s Digital Transformation Office and fully remote virtual digital health practice has driven a multitude of initiatives such as six virtual care programs including a hospital-at-home program and much more.

Partnering with QliqSOFT to implement a new web-based collaboration platform, Virtua Health succeeded in meeting rising consumer expectations to use digital services. A testament to that fact, the health enterprise’s digital health tools achieved a **world-class Net Promoter Score of 80 reflecting high patient satisfaction.**

An internal survey of staff users and patients conducted in July 2021 found:

- Virtua Health patients report the SMS messages and virtual visit solutions as easier to use than an app.
- A 400% increase in patient usage of digital tools.

### Reduce Costs and Streamline Patient Throughput

With a projected shortage of nearly 140,000 physicians by 2033, and a shortage of three million lower-wage healthcare workers in the next five years, U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy sounded the alarm on the country’s ongoing healthcare burnout crisis in May 2022.<sup>20</sup>

If burnout, worker shortages and increased time spent on repetitive tasks were not serious enough issues, there’s pressure on healthcare input costs. Rising healthcare staff labor costs per adjusted hospital discharge grew 25% between 2019 and 2022, reported McKinsey & Company.<sup>21</sup> Analysts added that the worsening clinical labor shortage is a significant contributor to the projected increase in healthcare costs over the next five years.

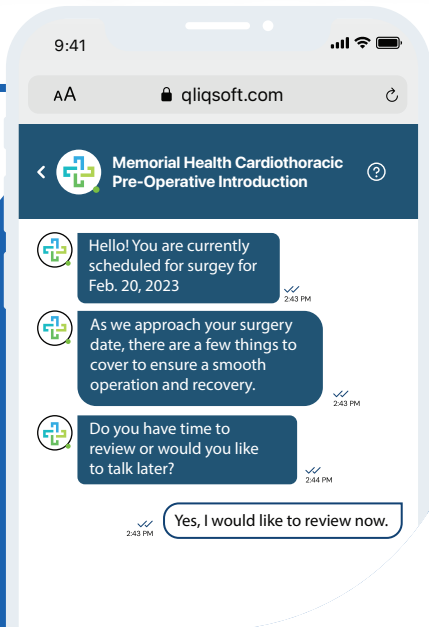
Now is the time to reduce time spent on manual repetitive tasks by embracing the use of robotic process automation (RPA) tools in your clinics, the hospital and post-acute care facilities. AI-enabled tools streamline practice operations and reduce time-consuming, routine tasks.

Organizations can automate common reasons for inbound telephone calls such as scheduling or changing a patient appointment, refilling medication, registering patients for classes, and more with RPA. By adopting RPA, staff can focus on performing higher-level needs and interactions that require a skilled resource to provide a consistent consumer experience.

## Increase Revenue

Digital technologies can create or modify business processes, culture, and customer experiences to help healthcare organizations grow and stay ahead of the competition. Identified are two key areas — referral leakage and patient no-shows — that are costing hospitals and practices revenue and are ripe for RPA.

**Prevent referral leakage.** Avoidable referral leakage may account for about \$100 to \$500 million in revenue loss annually for many health systems.<sup>23</sup> This is due to a referral system that still relies on paper documents and faxing and the patient to self-manage their referral. The result is the patient choosing to go out of network seeking a specialist or simply giving up after confronting too many barriers pursuing a referral in our current fragmented health system.



## Chatbots Deliver Results Fast

As with most other areas of healthcare, Virtua Health adopted a digital approach to referral leakage.<sup>24</sup> The community healthcare system created the “Cardiothoracic Pre-Operative Introduction” telehealth program. This clinical case scenario illustrates how the digitally enabled program works:

Immediately following a cardiac catheterization with abnormalities warranting cardiothoracic surgical evaluation, the patient can speak with a cardiothoracic surgeon in real time via a complimentary audiovisual encounter. Staff can add family members or other caretakers to the encounter; and this, in turn, allows real-time feedback from the operating surgeon to assist in the patient’s medical decision-making regarding next steps proceeding with surgery.

The cardiothoracic surgery virtual consultation services give Virtua Health the opportunity to reduce leakage by about 20 to 25 cases per quarter.<sup>25</sup> With the national average cost for a single cardiovascular surgery ranging from \$70,000 to \$200,000, the payback on the complimentary virtual visit/consultation for an organization can range from \$1.4 million to \$5 million in additional revenue per year for just cardiothoracic surgeries.<sup>26</sup>

**Reduce no-show rates.** Text or email appointment reminders and self-scheduling empower providers to reach more people and avoid inefficiencies, thereby reducing no-show rates, which can be as high as 15–30%, and raising capacity to treat more patients. With an average charge for a physician visit around \$200, and an average Primary Care Provider (PCP) seeing 2,300 patients per year, the revenue gain can easily exceed \$138,000/year with even higher amounts for specialists.

## Prepare to Digitize Value-based Care

At its core, value-based care is all about advancing the Quadruple Aim:

1. Enhance patient experience
2. Improving population health
3. Reducing costs
4. Improving the work life of healthcare providers

With tight margins, incentive revenue for providers can be the difference between a profitable year or a loss.

Healthcare leaders can **optimize quality measure performance** and engage patients through proactive digital campaign outreach and streamlined operations, all the while improving patient outcomes. Going digital can also help alleviate health disparities in our healthcare infrastructure by proactively engaging patients lost to follow-up and healthcare access. Virtual healthcare can help providers engage individuals and underserved populations in marginalized communities.

According to Donald Hooker, CFA, an equity research analyst for 15+ years covering digital health, a major challenge to success in value-based reimbursement is healthcare's fragmented and siloed systems.<sup>27</sup> The good news is that legislative and regulatory actions are addressing these interoperability challenges. The 21st Century Cures Act, for instance, is opening closed systems and giving AI and machine learning access to larger data sets. This improved data access, in turn, identifies new insights that positively impact patient outcomes and population health.

## AllianceChicago's Digital Engagement Reduces Disparities in Well-child and Immunization Completion

AllianceChicago, a national network of more than seventy community health centers across nineteen states, tested an innovative mechanism to use chatbots for engaging families and caregivers in evidence-based preventive care for children.<sup>28</sup>

They provided access of QliqSOFT Quincy's conversational chatbots to personalize messages and facilitate appointment scheduling with parents and guardians who serve approximately 10,500 children, 82% identify as racial and ethnic minorities.



**“Despite the pandemic, healthcare chatbots facilitated a relative increase in well-child visits and immunizations by 27% in the intervention group.”**

The app-less digital outreach reminded families in their preferred language of upcoming well-child visits and immunizations, provided anticipatory guidance materials from the CDC before the visit to enrich the dialogue and facilitated easy appointment scheduling of babies and children for well-child visits.

The healthcare chatbot campaign simultaneously sent texts to multiple individuals whose children are within two weeks of needing a recommended wellness visit and vaccines. From the text message, recipients launched either an English- or Spanish-language Well-Child chatbot from their smartphone which

guided them through a predefined automated conversation that provided age-specific education, asked predefined questions, and gave guidance based on recipient answers.

Key findings revealed that despite the pandemic, healthcare chatbots facilitated a relative increase in well-child visits and immunizations by 27% in the intervention group. Well-child visits and immunizations in the intervention group also demonstrated an increase of 13% compared to the usual care group. Survey results of patients and clinician interviews indicated a high level of satisfaction using a healthcare chatbot.



See how AllianceChicago reduced disparities in well-child visits and immunization completion in vulnerable communities using Quincy chatbots

## Respond to Competitive Pressures

As patients have more choices, providers need to realign around patient-centric, digital-first solutions as a business imperative. The transition to consumer-driven healthcare makes every interaction, either in person or digital, increasingly critical to improve patient experience and achieve greater satisfaction. Two key areas that AI-powered tools address successfully are:

- **Patient loyalty.** Digitally enabling your operations and intake processes promotes patient loyalty. The lifetime value of a single patient is an estimation of the net profit that the entire future relationship with the patient can generate which can be more than a million dollars per patient at a health system. With 82% of patients saying **quality customer service** is the most important factor they consider when choosing healthcare, focusing on patient experience pays.<sup>29</sup> Digital care services can help maintain long-term relationships with your patients through ongoing engagement and communication while providing superior care. Happy patients expand your practice and profitability.<sup>30</sup>

- **Competing with new digital-first competitors.** New entrants to primary care are applying their direct-to-consumer experience, targeting both profitable sub-segments of care delivery and those that impact decisions influencing the cost of care.

The road to digitally enabled care requires a transformation for everyone. Responding to competitive pressures is just one piece of the puzzle. It is important to select a versatile digital solution that creates a more customizable experience and can support the varied needs of the organization. Look for real-life provider use cases that quantify results.

## What Does Success Look Like?

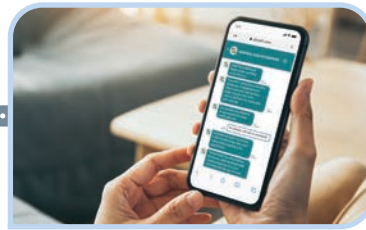
Here is one example of a patient journey in an ambulatory setting:

### Identify Gaps in Care



Receive an alert communicating the need for preventive services

### Promote Health Literacy



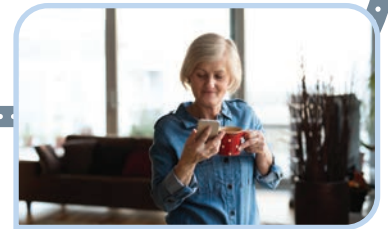
Reinforce the importance of acting

### Proactive Outreach



Send appointment confirmation and reminders, patient education and preprocedure instructions

### Simplify Access



Link to self-scheduling to make an appointment

### Convenient



Support remote check-in, sign consents, and scan insurance card

### Timely



Patient shows up prepared for their appointment

## Getting Started: Establishing Governance

Health systems have invested heavily over the past years in digital technologies. As digital health leaders navigate complex organizational cultures, dynamically evolving technologies and changing consumer online preferences, they are looking for trusted partnerships and governance support from within their organizations.

Virtua Health instituted an operational support department and governance model in the form of a Digital Transformation Office (DTO) to ensure that these new patient engagement models worked as advertised, garnered sufficient buy-in, benefited both patients and practitioners, and became ingrained in the organization’s caring culture and model of service.



Virtua Health implemented these four practices:



Formed a **strategic advisory committee** to select the right digital solutions, safeguard sharing of health information, and drive adoption for those who do not immediately buy-in.



Involved **key committee stakeholders** — clinicians, nurses, legal, IT, operations and those affected by the specific business process under discussion — shared ideas and tactics to move a project forward.



Included a marketing employee, part of the committee, **played the role of patient/consumer**, providing valuable input into why a digital program should be launched and how a patient would interact.



To drive impact at scale, the committee **cultivated digital champions** who recognized the value of virtual care adoption and its potential to transform manual to automated processes.



Listen to – DGTL Voices: Keeping Up With the Tech Evolution & Putting the Patient First – Ed Marx, Danielle Wilson, Assistant VP of Digital Transformation and Dr. Angela Skrzynski, Lead Physician for Telehealth at Virtua Health

Governance puts a structure around projects and data points, helping organizations keep their focus on what is important. Virtua Health has identified evolving best practices that contribute to their success:

- 1. Prioritize.** Do not boil the ocean. Pick meaningful projects with internal champions. Size them to deliver quick wins that build support for the program. Create an internal support team that can drive projects and provide support to the team members who are still delivering services.
- 2. Implement.** Take an agile approach to innovation, launch projects that are 100% clinically relevant and sound while the technology and related processes may only be 80%–90% completed, and iterate as you learn to refine the solution.

### 3. Measure and monitor.

- I. Storytelling with data is crucial when describing the importance and impact of a project and how it supports the strategic imperatives. Quantify the problem, quantify the results, and perform post-change monitoring to hold the gains.
- II. Executives closely track a few meaningful data points across the organization instead of trying to keep up with all of them.
- III. Departments track their specific operational metrics to hold the gains, e.g., celebrate wins, and analyze challenges to determine the changes needed to maximize success.

### 4. Expand. Find the next project, the next champions and metrics — and repeat again and again.

### 5. Be realistic. Expect 85% change management and 15% technology tools. As you are selecting the technology:

- I. Look for flexibility and ability to support many different needs.
- II. Minimize the number of solutions to enable a consistent patient experience. In doing so, select a partner who can flex and solve many types of problems.
- III. Look for helpful self-service tools that can move beyond initial, more common use cases and personalize what your organization needs.

### 6. Expect (yes, do expect) to see immediate results. Digitizing manual processes delivers immediate impact. But recognize that optimizing process, policy, and technology are the norm after go-live, along with the need to plan for a period to make changes based on acquiring new knowledge.

### 7. Select a partner that focuses on results. Pre- and post-measures are critical to highlighting success, identifying where you can improve performance and have the most impact.

From automated patient communication, streamlined, clinical collaboration to operational efficiencies and lower costs, QliqSOFT is helping healthcare provider organizations establish enviable patient and care team experiences driving loyalty and retention. QliqSOFT implements Quincy virtual solutions quickly, with an organization netting measurable results in the first month.



## About the Authors



***Krishna Kurapati is the Founder & CEO of QliqSOFT.***

He has more than two decades of technology entrepreneurship experience. Kurapati started QliqSOFT with the strong desire to solve clinical collaboration and workflow challenges using artificial intelligence (AI)-powered digital technologies across the U.S. healthcare system.



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