



The Disruption of Primary Care:

How Customer-Obsessed Companies
are Changing Everything

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The future of primary care extends far beyond the physician's office to pharmacies, supermarkets and retail clinics including CVS, Walgreens, Target and CityMD, as well as virtual care companies such as MDLive and Amwell. Increasingly, internet and technology companies like Amazon, Google and Apple are showing signs of getting into the healthcare services and information arena. With well-established consumer relationships and loyalty, expansive distribution channels and a relentless focus on delivering convenience and value, these formidable customer-centric companies are primed to become preferred alternative providers of health information and low-acuity services, while lowering the price point of primary care services.

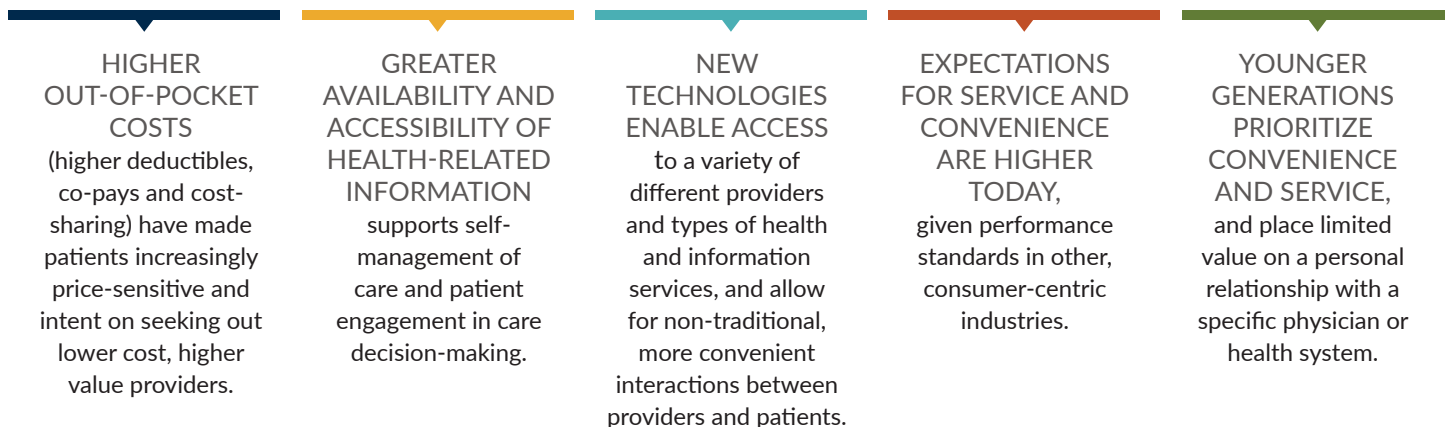
To succeed in this new environment, provider organizations must become "consumer-obsessed." A relentless focus on anticipating and delivering on the primary care needs and preferences of current — and potential — consumers is the only way for organizations to remain relevant amidst an abundance of new, innovative players in primary healthcare delivery. Providers will need to broaden their vision for primary care and reimagine their relationships with their patients, communities and clinicians. For too long, traditional providers have relied on the primary care medical home model (PCMH) as the principal vehicle for enhancing market position and attracting the critical volume of new patients necessary for success. While PCMH works well for some who rely upon the traditional PCP relationship and provides a foundation for chronic disease management and some aspects of population health, it is not a sufficient approach for developing a system of primary care that will effectively engage consumers and communities. Today's competitive landscape requires a broad-based portfolio of integrated primary care services and delivery models that addresses the preferences of consumers and supports the sustainable growth and community reach necessary for future success.

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Emergence of the Healthcare “Consumer” and Growth of Retail Health

Five primary factors
have led to an increasingly independent and proactive healthcare consumer:



Today, being seen as the preferred healthcare provider is as much about being a trusted and convenient source of health information and partner in self-care management, as it is about an actual site of clinical care delivery or individual relationship with a clinician.

While health systems and medical groups have attempted to widen the front door to patients (e.g., after-hours clinics, expanded use of APPs, virtual visits), these initiatives have typically been either outsourced to non-traditional providers (e.g., CityMD for walk-in/urgent care; MDLive for virtual care) or relegated to off-site locations with non-system clinicians. In most cases, these innovative, alternative approaches have not been truly incorporated or integrated into a system of primary care and health information delivery. An example is a large mid-western medical group with a virtual care program housed under the VP of Strategy, with no coordination or connection to the primary care model being developed by the CMO. As a result, this important and patient-preferred primary care option has been slow to market and inadequately linked to other system service offerings or resources. This is a lost opportunity for any health system to learn from new approaches and new partners and to expand its vision for the provision of health information and services through a broader primary care delivery system that is more responsive to consumers’ needs and preferences. And consumers are not waiting patiently for health systems to come around – one health system in Pennsylvania found that 61% of its patients would choose an urgent care or retail clinic over their PCP despite good patient-PCP relationships.¹

Health systems’ struggle to build and sustain patient affinity or loyalty has afforded non-traditional companies the opportunity to create new models of what a health care provider can look like and where consumers can go for health-related services and information. Today, drugstores and supermarket-based pharmacies provide nearly a quarter of all adult flu shots, and workplaces provide an additional 17%.² Retail health and urgent care clinics continue to proliferate, with virtual and on-line health and information services catching up quickly.



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COMPANIES LIKE AMAZON, GOOGLE AND APPLE ARE
**POISED TO CAPITALIZE ON THEIR ABILITIES TO
BUILD STRONG CONSUMER RELATIONSHIPS**
& TO IDENTIFY AND RESPOND TO EMERGING CUSTOMER
PREFERENCES FOR DIFFERENT TYPES OF INFORMATION
AND SERVICE DELIVERY.

Not only do these companies have the relationships, they also have the scale and tools (e.g. platforms, technology, infrastructure) to provide home-based and virtual services through their own platforms and networks, and to substantially shift/lower the cost of key services, if they choose to move in that direction. And web-based health companies such as FetchMD and ZocDoc are making it easier for tech-savvy consumers to find and connect with new sources of health services and information that prioritize convenience and customer service. These new entrants will continue their focus on the less complex end of the primary care spectrum – wellness and health maintenance, minor acute care needs, basic chronic disease management – leaving the most medically complex and most resource-intensive patients for traditional provider organizations. The implications are significant, including reduced visit volume and revenue, higher cost of care delivery, and decreased long-term ability to build affinity and loyalty among current patients and the broader community.

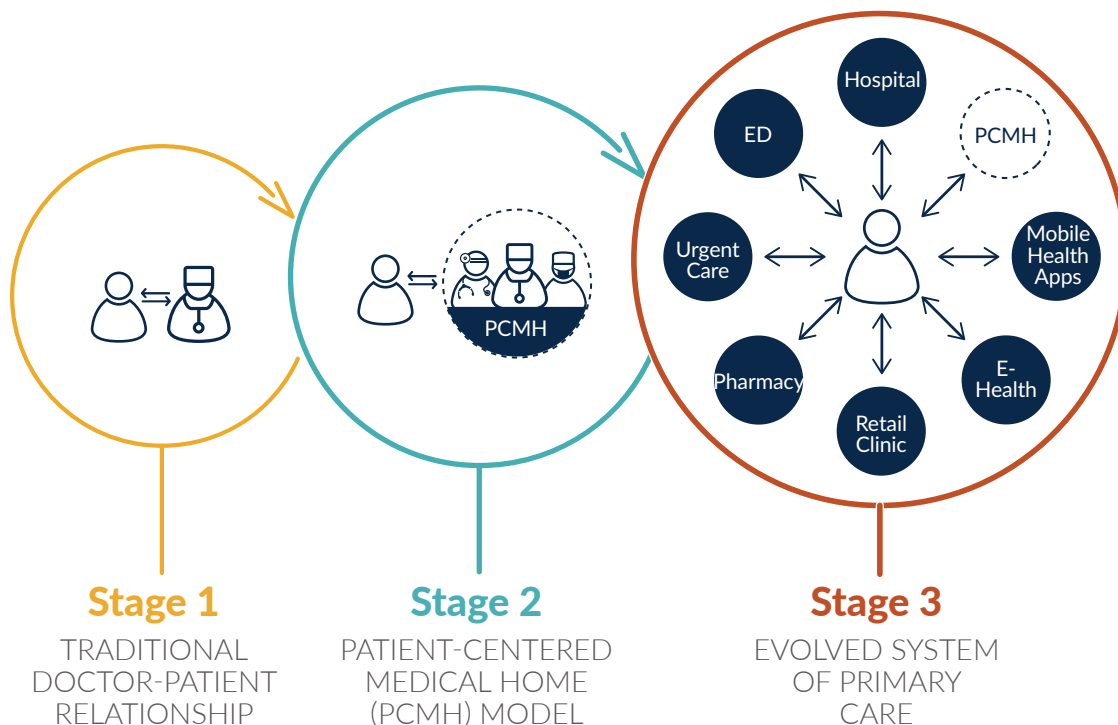
Positioning Your Primary Care Delivery System for the Future

To succeed in this environment, provider organizations must create a new vision for primary care – one no longer predominantly defined by a medical home model or by a doctor's office. Much can be learned from recent transitions in other industries such as retail, banking and entertainment; questioning everything – traditional structures, processes, staffing, beliefs about what consumers want or value – is a critical first step. Thinking creatively about the who, where, when and how of health services and information delivery in ways that address consumers' needs for greater affordability, value and convenience is what will build brand awareness and enduring relationships with consumers and the community. For example, being seen as an important online information source, sponsor of community-based wellness and education, and partner to virtual service providers will foster the engagement and affinity needed to remain top-of-mind for consumers when they are ready to access office-based care and services.

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Tomorrow's primary care delivery system must be broadly defined as an expansive complement of healthcare and information services and offerings which support individuals in their self-care and health management and optimize community health and well-being. Consistently delivering value, quality and convenience to consumers across a full portfolio of services will likely require a combination of owned, partnered and affiliated resources. The ability to create and leverage relationships and multi-faceted access modalities will be critical. The following visual illustrates how the primary care universe has already been re-defined and will continue to evolve and expand with the entrance of new health service and information providers, all seeking to position themselves as the provider of choice for consumers in an increasingly competitive environment.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE PATIENT RELATIONSHIP WITH PRIMARY CARE



Traditionally, patients related directly with their physician, possibly a nurse, and few others.

When patients receive care through a PCMH, they may relate to several members of a care team *under the direction of their physician.*

In the presently emerging system of primary care, the *patient independently engages* and interacts with a variety of different sources of health services and information based on their perceived needs and preferences, which may be influenced by their physician/PCMH team.

There is still the opportunity for health systems to have a prominent role in evolving primary care health services and information delivery. To do so, they will need to acknowledge and grasp the demands of consumers and avoid their own hubris in thinking that they alone can deliver primary care. Health systems will need to continuously earn and retain consumers' affinity and reliance with each decision about where and how to access health care services and information. Providers must deploy and engage in a broad array of modalities and capabilities to meet the preferences of their diverse communities. Failure to do so will relegate physicians and health systems to vendor or niche roles, which will be insufficient to meet financial and capital requirements. The time is now to create and pursue a new vision for primary care.

Sources

¹ National Immunization Survey-Flu (NIFS). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). 2015

² Heath, S. (2017, October 2); Access Falters Amidst Good Patient Primary Care Relationships; Retrieved from <https://patientengagementhit.com>

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