

ARTICLE

How healthcare organizations can pivot to advanced consumer access with Melissa McCain

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Patients have transformed expectations for how they access care. And they're demonstrating their demands by taking their healthcare needs to organizations that provide the timeliness, options, and convenience they're looking for. Healthcare organizations that get ahead of this trend will lead in their markets.

Melissa McCain has advised leading national and regional health systems and academic medical centers for more than 20 years, specializing in consumer access experience, clinical management, and patient engagement. She is a [Consumer Access](#) and [Digital Transformation](#) practice leader at The Chartis Group.

When Melissa isn't working, you'll find her baking anything chocolate and hiking with her beloved dogs.

Chartis: What are the major forces impacting access to care?

Melissa McCain:

We've been talking about this force for a long time, but it is clearly present now: patients have become consumers.

As consumers, they have more options than ever. And more than ever, they are choosing how they want to interact with healthcare organizations. In fact, in a recent poll we conducted, about 70% of consumers indicated that they would look elsewhere if their experience of accessing care was unpleasant, inconvenient, or resulted in an appointment that was too far off.

Similarly, consumers are expecting and seeking out digital options when trying to gain access, from scheduling appointments through the visit itself.

This is all complicated by everything that has happened with the healthcare workforce. Not only do you have consumers who are demanding more and wanting more convenience and timeliness of care, but you also have a workforce that is disrupted and fairly unstable relative to the demands of the consumers.

Chartis: Given expectations and workforce constraints, what do you view as the keys to advancing access?

McCain:

There are two elements in particular that health systems and providers are going to need to focus on simultaneously and expeditiously: The first is streamlining and digitizing all the ways consumers can connect with and schedule care and services. The second is balancing the supply of services with actual and anticipated demand, a balance that is becoming more complex.

It's our belief that organizations that can pivot themselves on these two fronts both quickly and effectively can advantageously position themselves in their markets. That being said, those that fail to do so will likely have ongoing and growing challenges associated with attracting and retaining consumers, and providers and staff as well.

Chartis: For organizations that are ready to make that pivot to advanced access, where should they focus?

McCain:

Organizations need to fundamentally rethink how they approach what we'll call supply and demand. Access is about supplying services to meet the demand — it's also increasingly about creating demand through some really interesting new methodologies.

These are the three things to further build out supply in an effective and cost-effective way: First is optimizing your current provider base. Second is getting very good at next-generation care teams, which includes fully deploying advanced practice providers (APPs) and behavioralists in ways that expand your provider base rather than being duplicative. And third is focusing on digital solutions to support your efforts.

For example, the digital front door is a cost-effective way to enhance the consumer experience and support growth. It enables patients to immediately and easily engage with the health system across a spectrum of questions and services. And it should reduce costs of onboarding new and established consumers.

Another key focus is the service center. This is your traditional contact center on a digital platform. It seamlessly integrates cost-effective, automated interactions along with agent-assisted interactions, enabling health systems to provide a comprehensive set of access offerings.

Chartis: What are the practical next steps for healthcare organizations?

McCain:

Focus on understanding your supply — how much capacity you actually have. Then understand the current demand — both how much is walking through your door and how much you could generate. That gives you a baseline. From there, you can dream, grow, and think differently about how you manage supply and demand.

Organizations also should map out the end-to-end consumer journey and the digital touchpoints throughout. Take stock of where you are through every one of those touchpoints. What you attend to first, second, and third will be different for each organization. Understand what those priorities need to be. Then, create a digital roadmap that overlays your broader access strategy.

Chartis: Any additional thoughts?

McCain:

We've just started to scratch the surface of both consumerism and digital as relates to access. Strategies and transformational solutions need to be developed and implemented fairly quickly. The pace is increasing exponentially. Organizations that can get ahead of it will be leading their markets in a way that will be difficult for others to be fast-followers. Ultimately, the actions organizations take today will set them up to be either leaders or laggards in the coming years.

Forces for Change is an annual trend outlook report from The Chartis Group focused on defining the forces shaping healthcare today and outlining what health systems can do to prepare for what's next.

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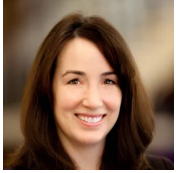
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