

# Impact of Home Healthcare Provider Communication on Consumer Satisfaction



A new Porter Research study of 300 patients and family caregivers who experienced home healthcare in the last 12 months reveals that home healthcare providers are falling short when it comes to what really matters to the consumer.

Home healthcare consumers, defined in this study as patients and their family caregivers, now expect providers to facilitate a real-time communications experience that they are accustomed to in other aspects of life.

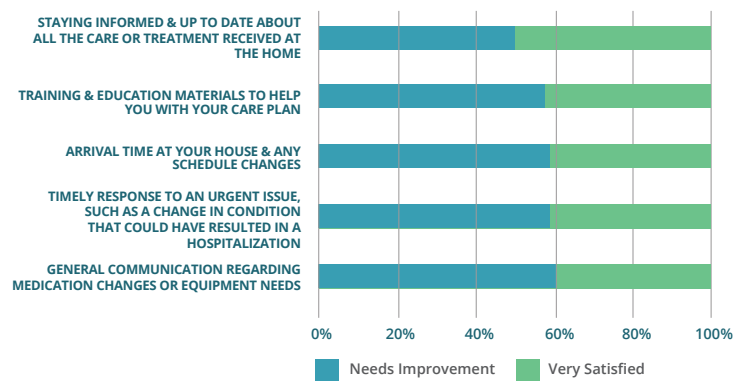
The results indicate that outdated communications mechanisms used most frequently by home healthcare providers can negatively impact the Home Health Care Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HHCAHPS) survey results and can heavily influence choice of home healthcare provider.

This report demonstrates the impact that communication strategy can have on patient and family caregiver satisfaction and lays out a roadmap for home healthcare providers that want to improve the customer experience and turn communication into a competitive advantage.

## Providers Need to Bolster Communication Around What Matters Most

Each year, home healthcare providers and their referral sources anxiously await the results of their HHCAHPS survey results, which influence perception of a provider's relative quality in the market and can impact patient referrals. This research study found that on average 57% of patients and family caregivers claimed that providers need improvement on the five communication related HHCAHPS survey questions including keeping patients and family caregivers informed and up to date on care and treatment, training and education, arrival times and scheduling, timely response to urgent issues, and medication changes or equipment needs.

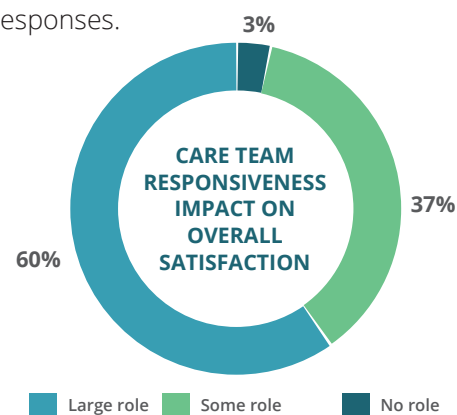
### PATIENT & FAMILY CAREGIVER SATISFACTION HHCAHPS COMMUNICATION RELATED QUESTIONS



*Notably, the biggest categories needing improvement were communication regarding medication changes or equipment needs, followed by timely response to an urgent issue.*

## Responsiveness Has a Major Influence on Consumer Satisfaction

Consumers are focused on responsiveness when it comes to provider communication, meaning, how quickly can the patient or family caregiver receive a response to a question or urgent need. Across all methods of communication, nearly every patient and family caregiver surveyed indicated that the method of communication influenced their satisfaction, with 60% saying it played a major role in their HHCAHPS survey responses.

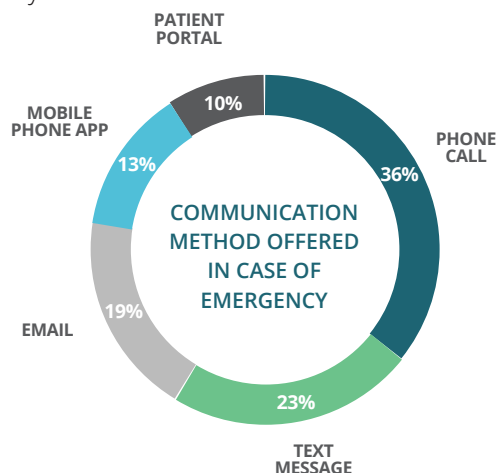


As one might expect, consumers also reported that more timely communication positively influences overall satisfaction. If patients and family caregivers receive immediate responses, and do not have to play phone tag or send several communications to get the answer they need, they will respond with better survey results. For home health care providers, utilizing the method of communication that provides the timeliest response is critical to improve satisfaction.

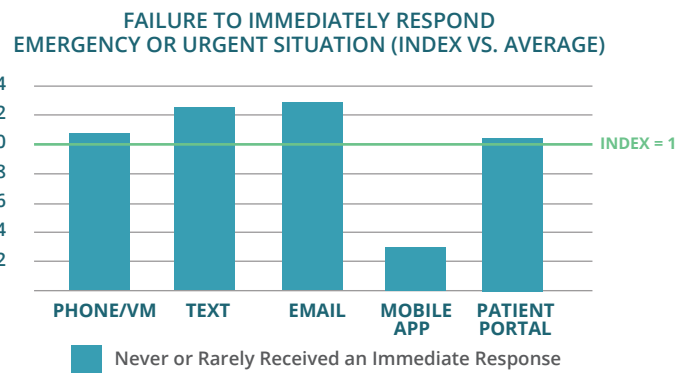
Patients and family caregivers that reported being “very satisfied” with provider communication on urgent needs were 17% more likely to say the method of communication had a major influence on their satisfaction.

### Outdated Communication Methods Negatively Impact Response Rates

While responsiveness directly influences satisfaction, the most common communication methods used outside of the in-person visit do not support immediate responses as much as would be desired. It should not be surprising that phone, text, and email were used 70% of the time by home healthcare providers, with mobile phone apps and patient portals making up the rest. Respondents also said that phone, text, and email were offered up 78% of the time for emergency use.



This statistic highlights that home healthcare providers need to catch up to the rest of the world when it comes to implementing customer-centric communications strategies that facilitate immediate responses. When it came to addressing urgent issues, for example, respondents were 4-5X more likely to receive a delayed response from phone, text, email, and patient portals than instant messaging through a mobile phone app.



There is a time and a place for each communication modality. Phone, while great when you can reach someone on the first attempt, often results in missed calls, voicemails and many times requires several calls to accomplish one task because of its linear, one-to-one nature.

A text message can go unnoticed because the recipient is not looking at the work phone. Further complicating standard text messaging is the insecure nature of the modality, which could lead to HIPAA security breaches.

Email and patient portals are not designed to be “instant” communication methods. When a patient or family caregiver cannot immediately reach the right care team member for an urgent issue, the next call is 9-1-1.

There is a better solution that provides consumers with the immediate gratification they desire and enables home healthcare providers to be the primary point of communication in an urgent situation.

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A mobile messaging solution that employs secure, HIPAA-compliant technology that automatically and instantly escalates inbound patient and family caregiver communications means the right care team member can immediately respond to a patient need.

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## Mobile Communications Solutions Can Translate to More Patients and Higher Satisfaction

In an age where technology satisfies consumers' need for instant communication, patients and family caregivers overwhelmingly expect direct, real-time communication through mobile phone, tablet and PC from their home healthcare providers and will reward the effort in a meaningful way.

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**96%**

**WOULD PROVIDE BETTER HHCAHPS SURVEY SCORES.**

**WOULD CHOOSE ONE HOME HEALTHCARE PROVIDER OVER ANOTHER.**

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The challenge for many providers is determining the most effective way to provide this real-time communication. The good news is that the latest technology can help providers meet consumers in their preferred communication mode and respond immediately to urgent issues.

## Five Things You Can Do to Meet Consumer Demand for Better Communication

To better serve consumers, home healthcare providers must invest in technology that breaks down communication barriers to facilitate real-time communication with patients and family caregivers in the mode they prefer. Much like successful companies in other consumer-centric industries, home healthcare providers will find that with the right communication

technology strategy, they can create a hi-touch experience outside of the in-person visit.

### 1. REDUCE YOUR RESPONSE TIMES NOW.

As noted earlier, provider communication methods impact satisfaction. Survey respondents that reported being “very satisfied” with HHCAHPS survey questions like medication and equipment coordination and responses to urgent issues experienced a 20-30% higher rate of receiving immediate responses. Implement communication solutions that automatically escalate inbound patient and family caregiver communications to the right care team member that can immediately address the patient need on the first outreach, increasing the likelihood of solving a problem quickly.

VERY SATISFIED PATIENTS AND FAMILY CAREGIVERS RECEIVED IMMEDIATE RESPONSES MORE OFTEN

**+30%**

MORE TIMELY RESPONSES TO MEDICATION & EQUIPMENT NEEDS

**+20%**

MORE TIMELY RESPONSES TO URGENT ISSUES

### 2. DECIDE TO MEET CONSUMERS WHERE THEY ARE.

Today's consumer wants to communicate in the mode they are most comfortable in a given moment. Think about your own experiences with consumer-facing companies you interact with on a day-to-day basis that provide “omni-channel” communication, meaning one can reach out via any device at any time to solve a problem. Omni-channel communication in healthcare expanded during the pandemic in the form of virtual technology such as secure instant messaging, video visits and electronic signature capture. To increase consumer satisfaction, providers must enable as many services as possible in the mode each consumer prefers.

### 3. ALIGN TECH INVESTMENTS WITH CONSUMER NEEDS.

The Porter Research study identified seven consumer priorities for communicating in real time through a smart phone, tablet, or computer. Providers should use this information to prioritize investments that can have the greatest impact on patients and family caregivers.



**INITIATING A GROUP CHAT WITH MEMBERS OF MY CARE TEAM TO ANSWER MY QUESTIONS**



**PARTICIPATING IN A TELEHEALTH VIDEO SESSION WITH MY NURSE, THERAPIST, OR PHYSICIAN**



**KNOWING ABOUT SCHEDULE CHANGES FOR NURSE, THERAPIST, OR AIDE VISITS**



**COORDINATING THE DELIVERY OF MEDICATION AND/OR EQUIPMENT**



**IMMEDIATELY RECEIVING A RESPONSE TO AN EMERGENCY OR URGENT QUESTION**



**RECEIVING EDUCATIONAL INFORMATION OR TRAINING**



**RECEIVING AND SIGNING PAPERWORK**

### 4. ENSURE YOUR TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATES.

There are many solutions on the market that can address singular consumer needs for real-time communication including secure instant messaging, video telehealth, digital forms, electronic signatures, online education, and training. Most vendors provide tools that address one or a few consumer communications needs. The challenge with these point solutions is that they may not integrate with each other. This may result in more problems for a care team as they create workarounds to move data from

one tool to another. As you evaluate your options, look for a complete platform solution that solves these consumer needs and creates the efficiency of a seamless integration between each service. Ideally a platform solution is designed to support the latest CMS FHIR standard and integrate with your EMR.

### 5. TURN YOUR REAL-TIME TECHNOLOGY INTO A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE.

If 96% of patients and family caregivers want to communicate in real time via mobile phone, tablet, and computer, then your advanced communications capabilities become a competitive advantage. Once you implement a consumer-centric strategy that offers omni-channel communication, tell the world, including referral sources and prospective patients and families. Include these capabilities in your marketing materials, discuss it when meeting with new prospective patients and family caregivers, and include your referral sources in group messages so they stay in the loop and see for themselves how you treat their patients.



## Real-Time Communication Technology is Now a “Must Have”

In a July 2020 Home Health Care News / Citus Health survey, we saw that 74% of home healthcare providers viewed technology as a way to improve patient and family caregiver satisfaction. Now, with a deeper understanding of patient and family caregiver needs home healthcare providers can confidently invest in and reap the benefits of real-time communication solutions.

- **Become the preferred provider in a market.**

Earn a competitive advantage in the market by becoming the “preferred” choice for families and receive higher HHCAHPS survey scores. Referral sources will recognize the higher HHCAHPS survey results and have the assurance that your organization is investing in patient and family caregiver satisfaction.

- **Reduce unnecessary hospitalizations.**

Provide immediate responses to urgent issues around medication and equipment, a fall, or other adverse event to potentially avoid unnecessary emergency room visits and hospitalizations.

- **Increase staff satisfaction.**

Increase staff efficiency by minimizing the amount of time clinical teams spend on non-core duties and allow more time to care for patients. With staffing shortages and increasing staff burnout, a streamlining of communication with advanced technology that makes nurses’ lives easier would be a welcome change and may even lead to happier staff and lower turnover.

### ABOUT CITUS HEALTH

Citus Health offers the only completely integrated virtual patient care platform solution that removes barriers to communication to immediately improve your patient and family caregiver experience. With its auto-escalation technology, patient and family caregiver communications are instantly routed to the proper clinician resulting in immediate response to patient needs.

Communications via the Citus Health platform can be delivered to the patient and family caregiver through smart phone, computer, or tablet, based on the customer’s preference, and can even be via secure “app-less” technology. Integrated HIPAA compliant, secure features like auto-translated multilingual instant messaging, real-time video visits, customizable forms and surveys, and an education center, enables real time communication between your clinical staff, care partners, patients, and family caregivers. The result is better care, greater efficiencies and satisfied patients and families.

We believe that when we’re better connected, everyone wins.

To learn how Citus Health can help your organization improve the patient and family caregiver experience and HHCAHPS survey results while easing the workload on your clinical staff, visit [www.citushealth.com/home-health](https://www.citushealth.com/home-health).

### ABOUT PORTER RESEARCH

Porter Research works with healthcare and IT companies to develop and execute market research programs and create strategies using market intelligence uncovered. With 30 years of experience, we have worked with more than 300 IT companies, and complete thousands of interviews each year. This means we know your industry, we know how you need to use the data, and we execute the right research program to uncover what you can’t find on your own. For more information visit [www.porterresearch.com](https://www.porterresearch.com).

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