

Santa Clara Valley Medical Center Improves Patient Care with IVR



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Anyone who's ever had a bad experience navigating through an IVR (interactive voice response) system may be skeptical about a healthcare organization using this technology to make a positive impact on patient care, but that was exactly the case with Santa Clara Valley Medical Center (SCVMC).

One of SCVMC's biggest challenges is communicating with an ethnically diverse community, which includes a variety of Asian cultures where the majority is Vietnamese (32% of the local population), Hispanic (33% of the local population), and a significant number Punjabi, Croatian, and Russian immigrants with a large percentage speaking limited to no English. SCVMC provides language services in over 138 languages.

Adding to this challenge is the fact that a significant percentage of patients are under insured or uninsured and assisting these patients in getting coverage and establishing a new patient relationship with a primary care provider is particularly time-consuming. To save patients from having to drive to multiple clinics for service, SCVMC offered a phone appointment service through a dedicated call center, which also included a rudimentary IVR system that was supposed to simplify the signup process. "The average patient wait time was over 27 minutes, and we were experiencing dropped calls more than 30% of the time," recalls Greg Price, Deputy Director of Ambulatory Care at SCVMC.

TAKING A STANFORD APPROACH TO CUSTOMER SERVICE

Recognizing that it needed to take immediate action to remedy its patient intake and communication challenges, Price turned to Stanford University for assistance and was introduced to a program called Rapid Transformation. The program offers best practices and guidelines that enabled Price and a team of SCVMC associates to rethink their organization's call center practices. "So many call centers are preoccupied only with time on the phone and wait times," says Price. "But, using only those criteria misses the fact

that the reason our overall call center statistics were not acceptable was because patients were dropping off the line out of frustration and the agents did not have the tools to provide our patients what they needed. We made the decision to base the success of our call center on the quality of the call and the quality of the system leading up to the live interaction with a customer service representative."

One area SCVMC identified as a major contributor to its high wait times and dropped calls was the fact that it was placing all callers into the same queue and requiring each caller to answer far too many questions. The healthcare organization also realized that its legacy IVR wasn't equipped to handle the language diversity and intelligent routing capabilities required for Santa Clara's diverse population.

FINDING A MULTI-LANGUAGE, INTELLIGENT IVR

The Valley Medical Center's search for a new IVR led to an engagement with contact center solution provider Enghouse Interactive, which specializes in IVR and self-service solutions. After comparing the Enghouse Interactive IVR with SCVMC's needs the organization proceeded with the purchase. Over the course of the several months, a team of Enghouse Interactive engineers worked with the SCVMC IT team to ensure a smooth transition, which included not just removing the legacy system, but setting up and configuring an entirely different IVR process.

NEW IVR AIDS CALL CENTER'S RAPID TRANSFORMATION

The new IVR includes support for nine different languages, plus it enables SCVMC to "pre-sort" callers into key categories. "The system allows us to easily separate callers initially into three categories – established patients, new patients, and episodic patients," says Price. "Since established patients already have an assigned medical number, they can enter this information into the IVR prompt and quickly navigate through the system and schedule an appointment at the appropriate clinic with no customer service rep interaction required."

Among new patients, SCVMC is able to further sort callers into categories such as insured/uninsured, and it has a special queue for commercially insured, Medicare or Medicaid patients (Medi-Cal in California) so it is able to route callers to the appropriate customer service reps. "Rather than having anyone handle any call, we've developed specialty areas within our call center, which gives callers the feeling that the customer service rep is working at the specific clinic they're trying to schedule the appointment with," says Price.

Over a six month period after making changes to its call center and IVR, SCVMC has seen dramatic improvements. "Our average wait times dropped from 27 minutes to below 2 minutes, and our dropped calls were reduced by more than 17%," says Price. "We're still in the process of streamlining our call scripts, and we believe there are additional improvements that can be made, but we're very pleased with the big changes we've experienced so far."

Santa Clara County Valley Medical Center (SCVMC) is a major inpatient facility with a regional burn center, trauma center and spinal cord rehabilitation unit that operates seven large primary care clinics in Santa Clara County California and is currently serving approximately 250,000 residents who live throughout the county which is also known as Silicon Valley. The clinics offer services in internal medicine, children's health, women's health, and all are equipped with lab services, diagnostic imaging, pharmacies, and dental clinics. SCVMC also operates a large centralized specialty center that offers a full range of specialties including a diabetes center, cancer center, and a large hemodialysis unit that supports this extensive primary care network and medical center. ■

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