

## Hospitals Tap Startups to Boost Patient Satisfaction (WSJ)



Docent Health employs docents who learn about patient preferences.

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Going to the hospital is no one's idea of a good time. A group of venture-backed startups seeks to make the experience better.

Venture firms are financing such startups as Docent Health Inc., WiserCare Inc. and Quietyme Inc., all of which have technologies to improve patient satisfaction about the care they receive and how they are treated in the hospital. The interest comes amid rising demand for tools that help hospitals deliver better patient experiences—and increase their profitability and competitiveness in the process.

Patient-satisfaction scores can already send a hospital's Medicare reimbursement up or down. And with websites like Yelp enabling consumers to post hospital reviews, health-care providers face increased pressure to deliver the same high level of service that people expect from other industries.

“Everyone is realizing this is very important and it's the right thing to do,” says Jennifer Jasmine Arfaa, chief patient experience officer for Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia.

Fifty-eight percent of U.S. hospitals employ a patient-experience executive, up from 22% in 2013, according to a new Beryl Institute report. Hospitals with high marks by patients are more profitable, according to a 2016 Deloitte study.

By improving patient experiences, health systems aim to earn better patient-satisfaction scores and higher Medicare reimbursement. By building better relationships with patients they can also encourage them to stay with the same hospital network instead of seeking care elsewhere, says Docent Chief Executive Paul Roscoe.

Boston-based Docent, whose investors include Bessemer Venture Partners and New Enterprise Associates, employs professionals, dubbed “docents,” who work with hospital staff and get to know patients’ preferences and concerns.

Dignity Health, a large health system based in San Francisco, is testing docent services at two medical centers in an effort to deliver more tailored care to expectant mothers. Docents work with women before they give birth to help them get access to specific resources, such as education on nutrition and preventive health services. They can also help with Dignity’s efforts to screen mothers for postpartum depression, says Rich Roth, Dignity’s chief strategic innovation officer.

Other companies aim to improve patients’ satisfaction by helping them share the process of making decisions about their care with their doctor. That’s the goal of WiserCare, which helps prepare patients for their doctor visit.

Patients considering knee surgery, for example, could log on to WiserCare’s system and answer questions about their goals and tolerance for risk. Then the system recommends options based on the patient’s medical situation, preferences and the medical evidence.

Patients and doctors can use that information to help make for more effective hospital visits, says Laurie Smith, vice president of marketing and business development. WiserCare, based in Los Angeles and Seattle, counts Okapi Venture Capital among its investors.

Meanwhile, Quietyme and Reputation.com Inc. enable hospitals to spot problems that lead to negative experiences. Quietyme helps hospitals reduce unnecessary noise, one of patients’ chief complaints.

The Madison, Wis., company deploys noise-detection sensors in hospital rooms and other areas. Through its cloud-based technology, Quietyme can locate the source of the noise, such as people’s voices, and deliver recommendations to make hospital floors quieter. American Family Ventures is among the company’s backers.

Redwood City, Calif.-based Reputation.com originally helped consumers manage online reputations. The company, whose backers include Heritage Group, has since shifted to enterprise clients and is making health care its primary market. Heightened focus on cost and quality make health care a good market for the company, according to Pascal Bensoussan, chief product officer.

Through its technology hospitals can learn about negative online reviews and respond to them quickly. Online complaints can signal that patient-satisfaction scores could slip unless a hospital remedies a budding problem, according to Mr. Bensoussan.

“The faster you remediate, the more you improve health-care delivery,” Mr. Bensoussan said. “Unless you improve that health-care delivery, you will keep getting an increasing amount of negative reviews from dissatisfied patients.”