

June 2022

The great digital disconnect

By Michael Oleksiw CEO, Pleio

The long-awaited digital transformation of life sciences has arrived. It went from a promise to a need. Then came COVID, and the digital entrepreneurs, behavioral scientists and investors picked up momentum. The validity of becoming an urgent need has fed the creation of a tidal wave of start-ups and others crafting great digital solutions for a myriad of pharma challenges – especially those around engaging with, retaining, and supporting their customers. With so many technology solutions promising to solve so many problems – immediacy, efficacy, efficiency, cost savings, drive-by data, engagement, all promising better outcomes, is something missing? Yes. The human.

In 2020, nearly \$15 billion poured into health and wellness start-ups, nearly all having a prevalent technology offering; this nearly doubled in 2021 to \$29 billion. Virtual, telehealth, digital, devices, monitors, and more.

It seems like the introduction of so many technology-driven patient solutions has finally accelerated the industry transformation – yet, the technology is simply a quantifiable approach to a subjective problem: Better health outcomes and more satisfied engaged patients as metrics seem to be, as of yet, elusive. Technology alone cannot solve human-centric problems.

Why? The audience has also evolved.

80% of respondents noted that pharma gets "too distracted" building websites and apps and doesn't follow through on creating services that provide long-term engagement for HCPs and patients.

"There's a struggle to understand the value of ongoing customer engagement, whether with the HCP or patient."

Digitally speaking... Is what you're doing now relevant to the patient's needs and where they are emotionally?

Being a patient is a one-dimensional definition of "me." If you embrace that perspective, the pill-to-patient digital solutions fall short fast. A digital-only solution does not address the doubts that undermine commitment, the hopes that seem so elusive, and the fears that whirl around diagnosis – wondering how it will impact a patient's life. No pharmaceutical company is expected to address these entirely human, hard-wired behaviors and feelings. Even a great behavioral scientist will tell you the connection with another human has a manifold positive impact compared to a digital touch.



This is not about content or lack of treatment or condition education. Everyone wants the savings card, the educational email and brochures, the FAQs on how-to and efficacy. Yet, while pharma spends \$5 billion annually developing these patient resources, only a mere 3 percent of patients access them. We know patients want this kind of support. Almost two out of three people (63 percent) with chronic conditions say they would opt into pharma services with 80% unaware of these pharma patient support programs, according to a survey conducted by Human Care Systems.

Many pharmaceutical solutions are focused solely on treatment education, believing "support" is "care". Both are important but the former is functional, the latter uniquely emotional and human. The entry point of all health interactions is a human one – beginning with the patient and the doctor. While doctors strongly remain one of the most trusted sources of health information, certain realities undermine their authority in their patient's success.

Given the facts of today's patient-doctor interactions, there is no question that people need and want more technology-enabled support. Equally, these interactions dramatically demonstrate the need for human care to be a critical part of any technology solution's success.

Doctors want healthy patients and patients want to trust their doctors. What gets in the way? What are the reasons for leaping from live interactions to digital touchpoints?

- Typical patient appointment? 15-20 minutes.
- On average, the patient asks five questions, the doctor jumps in around 18 seconds in and then asks 25 questions. Does that really satisfy either party?
- The patient leaves and 50 percent go to search for more information about the appointment, diagnosis, tests, statements, reviews and social media. All digital strangers. And who knows how much is actually generated by a human?
- Google shows searches around health and wellness have gone up nearly 10 percent to almost 1 billion per year, evidence of the uncertainty so many feel.
- The Edelman 2022 Health Trust study shows a five-year decline of 10 percent in confidence making informed health decisions, across all demographics.

Even after all of the exposure to content, opinions, ratings, reviews – because we are humans first and patients second – these percentages demonstrate the disconnect:

- More than 20 percent of new prescriptions are never refilled.
- More than 50 percent of people stop taking their medications as directed by month six.

Clearly, in those critical moments of care, diagnosis and treatment decisions, there is not enough human-to-human interaction to quell the fires of uncertainty. Patients walk out unprepared. They reach for their smartphone. The disconnect has begun.

Unfortunately, the evidence indicates that a plethora of content and digital connections has not filled the gap.

What would it mean, if someone who was vetted and trained, but a peer, another nonprofessional who, with their own good intent and training, wanted to make sure you had what you needed.

To fill the gap, adding the human into the digital solution is the ultimate combination of compassion and content. People want to be heard, respected, and in that moment of health vulnerability, want a kind voice who offers to bridge some gaps. This is an incalculable gift and an ROI driver to help mitigate the negative outcomes still prevalent.

The patient journey has changed.

As patients, conversations with our doctors are first and foremost, but the path to patient support can mean many things. It's complicated and layered. Many pharmaceutical solutions are solely focused on treatment education, which confuses support for caring.

We live in a time when tech innovation is at its peak. It's an exciting time in our industry and brimming with opportunity. The future of all things digital has never been brighter. Bringing digital and human together to facilitate a patient's

therapeutic journey through the power of human connections and meeting the emotional needs of that therapy is the solution toward establishing true human centricity in healthcare marketing. The personal over merely the personalized.



While the industry itself is enamored with the newness and consistent stream of innovative digital technology discoveries, patients are not fully engaged with all of it. Making more solutions is not equivalent to making better solutions.

The digital disconnect is real.

While technology has accelerated its evolution, the perception and role of health has also evolved. People are more connected and health awareness is more pervasive than ever before, going far beyond the pill-to-patient paradigm that biopharma companies have worked with since the onset of DTC in the 1990s.

Nobody denies that health is a human issue that impacts nearly every aspect of our lives – economic, physical, emotional, family, and even a balance of work-life health. "Patient-centricity" suggests that patients are using technology more than ever. Research, however, supports a different notion, showing that patients are not fully engaging with all the tools they have access to. There is a lack of patient activity which supports that something is missing. Ninety percent of patients who are given access to their medical records don't use them, 41% are not signing up for patient

portals even with access to them, and there is low interest in using voice assistant devices for health information, with 34 percent saying they're not interested. With so many smart technology and digital solutions, better outcomes should be evident. Patients should be feeling more engaged, supported, satisfied, helped and cared for. But something is still missing.

We can't address the move to digital interactions without mentioning COVID and its impact on the industry quickly moving to solutions such as telehealth. Tech adoption was in swift motion during the pandemic for health providers, pharma marketers and patients alike. The "new normal" meant that patients could access their support needs digitally. Even as we celebrate the success of telehealth adoption, we are now realizing that it is a technology-driven solution for the doctor-patient interaction, and at its core, it is effective because it starts with a human conversation.

Again, the human + digital gap appears.

So, what does this mean for healthcare marketers?

True patient-centric healthcare is not onedimensional. A better brand experience is realized for health brands when a more humancentric approach is established. Health technology and humans CAN and MUST live in harmony together. Human + digital yields a proven better patient experience and activation.

The human side of medicine is being revealed.

The recent study from Dentsu Health shows 68% of patients reported that confidence in the effectiveness of telehealth is slightly declining, while preference for in-person visits remains consistent.

The human power of a kind "hello" is a universal door-opener, no matter what the condition or treatment. We are not talking about the supportive professionalism of a Nurse Hub/Call Center. This is basic "humanese" – when patients hear "hello" first, the human connection starts. This is where a non-clinical care team steps in –

as a peer who's there to say "you've got this" and helps guide an often-overwhelmed and anxious patient.

Different patients want and need different things. The only way we can find out what patients really need and want is by actually speaking to them as people first. The traditional CX (customer experience) current go-to methods address customer needs in functional tasks – biosensors, tracking devices, phone apps, scheduling appointments, smart pill bottles, etc. Even more, the industry has invested a lot in nurse HUBS, call centers, and professionally trained people who can help resolve so many important hurdles patients face. But they do not necessarily face the ultimate hurdle – the patient's lack of belief.

The Dentsu study, looking at patient engagement trends, states that pharma brands across the board should consider investing more in educational materials that make information about their products and conditions more consumer-friendly. The industry has known this for years, but the efforts are not there yet.

Biopharma companies are viewed more favorably when demonstrating trust-building signals: **humanity, transparency, capability, and reliability.**



Why isn't there more human in pharmaceutical marketing?

It's a tricky thing. There's fuzziness around defining a clear set of ROI metrics, concerns about off-label or AE and the perception of a heavy MLR lift. Through their digital nonengagement, it seems obvious that patients need more. The new patient experience carefully blends art and science, balancing emotional needs with functional tasks.

There is a new essential customer experience coming into focus. Digital alone is NOT the answer. The one-size-fits-all concept does not apply to patient support. Personalized and personal are two very different components of building patient knowledge, confidence and trust in their medications. The more pharma marketers create a feeling of "this organization knows me, they care about me, they're thinking about the long journey with me and not just this particular experience," the more patient trust builds.

What are you doing now to complement your digital strategy?

To jump from an intensely emotional experience like a new diagnosis or adding a new treatment, to an app or emails is like assuming you know how to drive when no one has given you the time for a lesson. It is a situation rife with the potential for failure. A peer human connection is inherently *personal* and unique in its ability to destigmatize a therapeutic journey and infuse a patient with confidence. From there, a *personalized* digital solution can assist a confident patient with long-term support.



Pharma marketers CAN and MUST create compelling solutions AND build powerfully **human brands**. Empathy, inspiration and connection are part of what consumers want and are seeking from all their brands. Pharma brands are no exception. Market-savvy pharma brands need to think about how best to service patients who don't want to be solely digitally connected. It's a question worth examining. Providing a comforting hand and VOICE during discomforting times just might be the answer.

About Pleio

Pleio Inc. uses the power of human connection to activate empathy between a nonclinical support team and millions of patients. Pleio boosts the results of treatment by minimizing the major points of medication fall-off after the first fill and past 100 days. Driven by patient data through its proprietary LIFT Technology platform, the GoodStart Program moves patients from emotion to action, removes barriers to adherence, and builds confidence in patient activity.

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