

Customer Acquisition Management at Private Clinics

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ABSTRACT

Life expectancy has increased dramatically in the present-day world. In Russia alone, it grew 10% over the period from 2000 till 2017 to reach a record high of 73.6 years in 2019. Being fifty years of age is not considered to be an old man anymore – it is more likely to be viewed as just another milestone of growing more seasoned and experienced. A person in their fifties is still young enough and definitely not old. Advances in medicine play a major role in increasing life expectancy.

Patients have become more demanding, particularly of medical equipment. People try to stay fit longer. An average patient has become more competent and expects medical services of a higher quality. All the above factors cannot but affect management practices in private clinics. For this reason, the management practices need to be improved on a regular basis, and so does patient flow management. Meanwhile, the competition on the health care market is growing. Effective medical logistics management could well become a competitive driver for the clinic.

Keywords: Private health care facility, service, organizational mechanism, effectiveness

INTRODUCTION

Global shifts transform traditional formats of medical services; patients become more demanding and competent in health maintenance. Health care facilities need to respond to these changes.

Patient care becomes an increasingly more important criterion for choosing a medical service provider both in large cities and small communities: patients want to receive high-quality medical services and proper care at every stage of treatment in the clinic.

The medical service market sees a competition for patients between public and private health care facilities, driven by government initiatives to make medical services more effective and by large market players consolidating their market positions.

Local markets witness a pronounced transition of patients from municipal to private clinics because municipal (public) clinics cannot, in most cases, offer the same quality of patient care and medical services as private clinics do. Uberization is gradually finding its way into medicine. As a result, time savings, digitalization, and a high level of comfort and satisfaction with the services become key values for the patient. When looking for high-quality medical services and care, patients move far away from their home cities and even countries.

At present, medical tourism is in high demand. In 2017, the global medical tourism market grew 4% to reach \$15 billion, while the global GDP grew only 3.5%. According to expert forecasts, income from medical and recreational tourism will increase 30% by 2022.

The number of medical tourists visiting Russia was about 10,000 people in 2014 and went up to nearly 120,000 people in 2017. Besides, medical tourists used to come mostly from former Soviet republics, Eastern European and Scandinavian countries, but now more and more tourists come from Western Europe, Israel and America. The main reasons why the Russian market of medical services is attractive for medical tourists are as follows:

- lower prices of therapies in Russia than in the tourist's country of residence;
- less time to wait for medical services;
- absence of certain medical specialists or equipment in the tourist's country of residence;
- high quality of medical services, unparalleled methods of diagnostics and treatment;
- combination of treatment and recreation.

No doubt that large cities remain priority destinations for medical tourists, but they also become more interested in smaller cities with a historical background, original architecture and beautiful environment.

In 2018, a medical tourism association was established in the Ryazan Oblast to bring together health care facilities offering different therapies, hotels in Ryazan and the pristine Meshchora area, and other local companies providing related services.

The primary objective of the association is to facilitate the inflow of medical tourists to the region and provide them with high-quality medical services, accommodation and recreation at affordable prices, with no intermediaries involved.

The growing competition also makes it necessary to improve logistics as a component of medical service availability and create conditions for local patients and medical tourists to be provided with care and comfort. Patient routing in action can be observed in almost any European-level private clinic.

Patient logistics is usually divided into several stages. The first stage is bringing the patient to the clinic. The second stage is patient routing inside the clinic. The third stage is patient routing after treatment.

If a clinic plans to cater for medical tourists, the first of the above stages seems to be the most difficult. The patient's consent to be treated in the clinic will clearly depend on the services and care offered and on how effectively the services are provided.

METODOLOGY

To achieve this goal, we used the method of organizational experiment, which allows us to find new, most rational forms and methods of work of a private medical organization by introducing the best practices and creating models of the quality of medical care with more effective logistical medical management.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Let us consider an example of a local private clinic offering services in aesthetic medicine, endocrinology, gynaecology and plastic surgery. In order to minimize the possibility of withdrawing the consent, the clinic has developed a procedure to bring the patient in.

To acquire new patients, the clinic uses a set of tools that includes advertising on the Internet (search engine optimization and context marketing), as well as service packages and special treatment programs.

So, the first step is to choose a service package depending on certain criteria (price, scope of medical services, etc.). The price of the package includes transfer and accommodation of the patients arriving from other cities and countries, three meals a day, and an entertainment program. The clinic has made agreements with hotels and restaurants (members of the medical tourism association) on special rates for its patients. The main benefit of the Premium package is that the patient receives consultation, diagnostics and treatment within the shortest time possible.

Under the Standard package, patients living outside the clinic are offered transfer by public transportation. The clinic is only responsible for finding public transportation tickets at the best price and for the optimal time. The patient willing to buy the Standard package is consulted and diagnosed by the doctor, with the treatment plan and next appointment discussed and agreed upon.

After the service package is bought, the front office manager confirms the agreed appointment with the clinic. The patient is provided with information about the trip and accommodation. The patient should confirm their consent.

The final step of bringing the patient to the clinic is directly related to the arrival of the patient at the health care facility. This includes, of course, assistance by the clinic's representative and calling the patient a taxi.

We should stress the importance of skilful communication with the patient, from the first contact with front office managers to information support after the patient's visit to the clinic. In an attempt to retain patients, health care facilities use a customized approach and provide support via online and offline communication channels, with the doctor being a key figure in offline channels. Today, patients expect that, apart from being

highly professional, doctors have excellent communication skills. It happens because patients are not always (and not immediately) able to estimate the quality of medical services provided, while the impression produced by the doctor during the first visit can hardly be changed in the future and may affect the patient's satisfaction and loyalty. For this reason, clinics pay increasingly more attention to communication skills training as part of a broader effort to improve the quality of services and patient care.

CONCLUSION

The five steps described above ensure that the patient is brought to the clinic where doctors come to the scene and get engaged at the next stages of interaction based on patient logistics to save resources of the health care facility.

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