



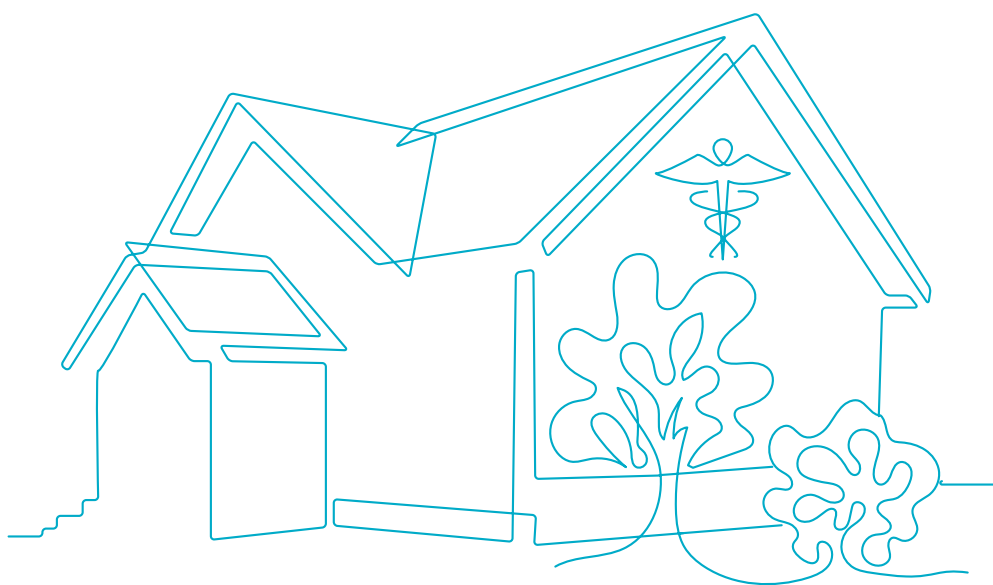
Practice Communication Solutions

How to choose software that delivers
simplicity and satisfaction.



Index

The Case for Modern Practice Communication	3
Essential Considerations in Choosing a Solution	4
5 Key Performance Metrics for Practices	6
Advanced Practice Communication in Action	7
Final Questions	10
Conclusion	11
Sources	11



The Case for Modern Practice Communication

The risks associated with inefficient practice communication drastically outweigh the cost of a modern solution.

80%

of all medical errors involve miscommunication.¹

38%

of messages go to the wrong clinician at the wrong time.²

Poor communication is a key contributor to medical errors, care delays, frustration, declining patient satisfaction, and increasing provider burnout, which are likely to lead to patient leakage and provider turnover.

82%

of healthcare consumers say they would switch providers because of a bad experience.³

Patient expectations, which are critical in shaping their experience with your practice, have changed significantly in recent years, especially in light of COVID-19. Since the pandemic forced organizations to make healthcare more remotely accessible, practices that don't offer seamless virtual care are now perceived by patients as inconvenient and obsolete in a world with many alternatives.

COVID-19 also intensified the spotlight on provider satisfaction, burnout, and turnover. What was already a problematic trend of industrywide clinician burnout has been compounded by pandemic-related surges in patient demand and declining resource availability.

~26%

of physician turnover is due to burnout.⁴

The rapidly evolving healthcare environment requires that practices choose a communication management solution that can keep up with the immediate and long-term needs of patients, providers, and the bottom line.

Essential Considerations in Choosing a Solution

Can a single solution support the communication needs of all staff, providers, and patients at all times—including in emergency situations—or will you need to purchase additional tools for unique circumstances?

To answer this question, first list all communication workflows used in your practice, beginning with your basic daily workflows. For example:



What is your team's current process for communicating with patients?



How do your clinicians coordinate care among themselves?



How are your shift and on-call schedules created, distributed, and kept up to date?



What are the different ways patients can get in touch with your practice?

How much time do these processes take? Outline **who needs to do what and when** to accurately complete each workflow. Are there any additional stakeholders to consider? List them too.

Now, list the **different systems, channels, and resources** involved in each workflow. Some may include:

- EMR/EHR
- Live Answering Service, Call Center
- Practice Management Software
- Patient Portal
- Call Sheet, Directory, Sticky Notes
- Spreadsheet Software, Paper Calendar
- HIPAA-Compliant Voice, Video, Text
- Smartphone, Landline Phone, Pager
- Computer, Email
- Video Conferencing, Telehealth Software
- Website Chatbot

After you have uncovered all the basic daily workflows, move into more unique workflows for **escalations, emergency situations, and natural disasters**.

Once you feel like you have listed all possible scenarios for your practice, ask yourself the following questions:

- Where do you see the need for new or better communication workflows? What existing gaps could put your practice, providers, or patients at risk?
- Are all the workflows you listed used as intended by your staff, or are workarounds ever used? If so, what are the workarounds, when are they used, and why?
- Is your staff's communication—whether workflow or workaround—always HIPAA compliant?
- **All things considered, what could be simplified and what is essential?**

Will the new system improve provider and patient satisfaction or create more frustration?

How often do you hear complaints from patients and/or staff about breakdowns in communication? Has your live answering service made errors when relaying messages? Have they contacted the wrong providers at the wrong times? Could satisfaction levels be higher among your patients and/or providers?

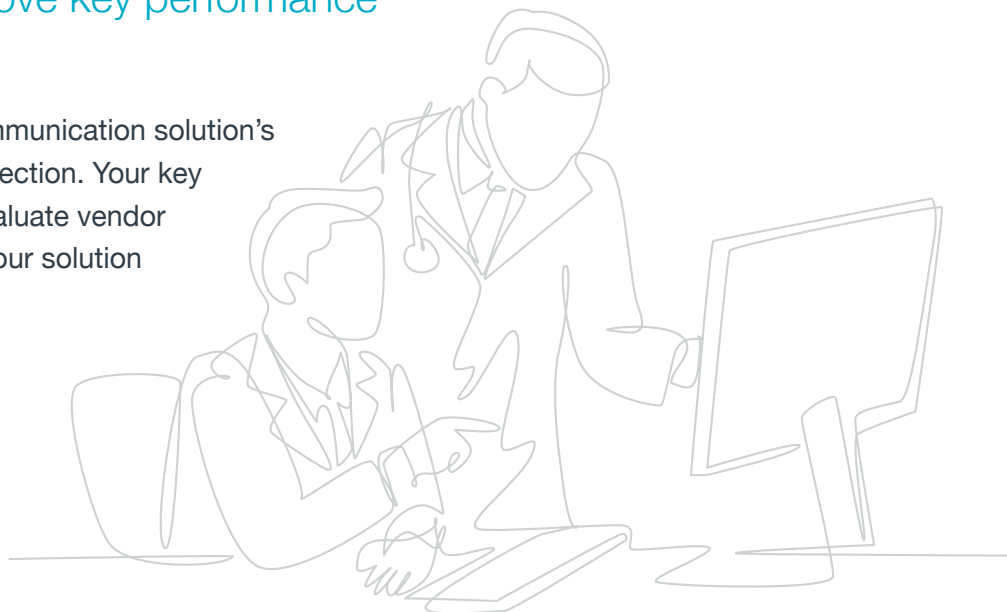
If there is any room for improvement, now is the time to alleviate challenges.

To be effective, your solution must be user friendly to encourage and simplify adoption. Make sure to look ahead so you don't have to change systems again soon. Can the new solution adapt over time to continue improving satisfaction, or will it remain stagnant?

Will the new solution improve key performance metrics for your practice?

Establish how you will track your communication solution's success prior to making your final selection. Your key performance metrics will help you evaluate vendor options and measure the impact of your solution after implementation.

We have identified **five key performance metrics** for practice communication.



5 Key Performance Metrics for Practices

1 Vendor Footprint

Review the number of vendors your practice currently uses to coordinate staff and patients (including after-hours answering services, secure messaging, scheduling software, telehealth, video apps, chatbots, etc.) and the associated costs of each vendor. Consider which vendors, if any, are capable of integration with one another for seamless communication workflows.

2 Additional Financial Costs

Look at your invoices in detail for added charges from vendors beyond the base cost, such as after-hours message delivery fees, hidden service charges, and variability in rates over time.

3 Provider Satisfaction

Whether you measure it by satisfaction surveys, general feedback, reported burnout, or turnover, provider satisfaction is key to your business and directly impacts patient care.

4 Patient Satisfaction

Patient satisfaction surveys and bidirectional follow-up communication are good ways to discover valuable feedback that might help prevent patient leakage. Provider accessibility, appointment wait times, speed to care, and other known drivers of patient satisfaction are also great indicators to track when possible.

5 Referrals and Consultations

The number of referrals and consultation requests your providers receive relies on their ability to respond in a timely manner and deliver a positive patient experience.

Provider
Replacement
Costs Start at
\$250k⁵



Advanced Practice Communication in Action

A comprehensive solution will offer flexibility, integrations, and a simple user experience to enhance your team's communication in several areas. Forward-looking technology is customizable and adaptive, evolving to meet your needs over time. Here are just a few example use cases for an advanced solution:

USE CASE #1

Accurate Routing of Patient Calls After Hours

Patient Sally Smith calls her orthopedic surgeon's main practice line after hours with a concern about post-surgical pain. The answering system presents a menu asking Sally if she is calling about an appointment, directions to the office, a medication refill, a routine request, or a more urgent request that requires reaching a provider. Sally selects that she needs to reach a provider and is prompted to record a voice message.

Based on the call schedule, the communication solution looks up the on-call provider, Dr. Green, who has specified that he would like to receive secure text messages after hours. Sally's voice message is instantly delivered to Dr. Green's smartphone and transcribed to text. With one click, he calls Sally back. The practice phone number is displayed on Sally's caller ID, masking Dr. Green's personal cell number.

Advanced automation uses provider schedules and contact preferences to route each message to the right person at the right time—even after hours—eliminating the risk of human errors associated with live answering services.

PRO TIP:

Larger practices can further simplify life for their teams by integrating an advanced scheduling solution with the practice communication management system. For example, PerfectServe's [Lightning Bolt Scheduling](#) automatically builds complete, gap-free schedules that accommodate practice requirements, patient demand, and provider preferences. This saves time building schedules, enhances smart-routing, and grants staff easy access to a single source of truth from anywhere with real-time updates, simple shift swaps, and easy time-off requests on the go.

USE CASE #2

Emergency Preparedness

A hurricane causes several road closures on the way to Dr. Day's practice and she is unable to make it to the office. She opens the practice communication management app on her smartphone and calls her practice with one click to let them know she cannot come in. Her practice calls the patients who need in-person visits to reschedule their appointments.

All patients who may not require an in-person visit receive a text message from Dr. Day's practice notifying them that, due to emergency circumstances, their visit must take place virtually or be rescheduled. Patients who opt for a virtual visit will receive a text message at the time of their visit with a direct link to a secure video chat—no login required.

The right solution will keep your staff and patients connected 24/7, even when disaster strikes. We recommend a solution that is cloud-based, device and location agnostic, and backed by fail-safe emergency support. The ability to initiate video visits when needed increases patients' access to care while helping providers stay connected and productive despite environmental challenges.

USE CASE #3

The ability of your physicians to close the loop quickly is essential to keeping referrals coming into your practice. The right solution makes it seamless to find physicians easily, see their availability, and select alternative providers in the same practice when possible.

Timely Response to Consult Requests

Dr. Lane, a PCP, just finished a patient encounter and decided that the patient, Mary Marshall, needs to be referred to a urologist. Before making the referral, Dr. Lane wants to have a brief conversation with the specialist. She opens the clinical directory in her practice communication app and filters for all urologists within the city who are part of her healthcare system. She sees that her normal referral urologist is out of the office for two weeks, but another urologist in the same practice, Dr. Smith, is available.

In one click from the clinical directory, Dr. Lane initiates a text message to Dr. Smith asking for a brief call. Dr. Smith receives the message and calls the same day. After the call, Dr. Lane uses the practice communication app to text her PA to coordinate the referral. The PCP, urologist, and PA are all looped in on the chat.

USE CASE #4

Improved Experience for Patients and Providers

Patient Jane Doe is concerned about a rash that appeared on her arm after receiving her flu vaccine. Jane calls her PCP's office to ask if the rash is normal. Since it's after hours and the office is now closed for the day, the answering system presents a menu. Jane selects that she is looking to reach an on-call provider, and she is prompted to record a voice message. Jane's message is auto-routed by the practice communication management solution to the physician on call—Dr. Moore. Within 15 minutes, Dr. Moore uses the practice communication app to text Jane a link to a secure chat.

In the secure chat, Dr. Moore asks Jane to send a photo of the rash. Based on the image and information from Jane, Dr. Moore responds that the rash is no cause for immediate concern. Just to be safe, Dr. Moore connects Jane with his PA to arrange an appointment for tomorrow afternoon in case the rash persists. When Jane wakes up the next morning, her rash has subsided, so she calls the practice to cancel her appointment.

In this example, the practice communication management solution improves the experience in **three ways**:

1. Increasing Patient Access

The patient is able to reach out to her physician's practice after hours and receive a quick response that addresses her concerns. Advanced solutions even allow patients and clinicians to use images and video chat to communicate their needs most effectively.

2. Reducing Inessential Interruptions

Instead of interrupting time off for the patient's PCP, the message was routed to the physician on call. Similar routing rules can protect providers from disruption during patient encounters and surgery while ensuring all communication is addressed in a timely manner. Delineating message priority by alert tone can also help providers instantly distinguish whether a message can wait or if they should disrupt their current activity to address a more urgent message immediately.

3. Fewer Apps and Logins Per Workflow

The provider on call didn't have to juggle apps, conversations, or calendars to address the patient's needs. Clinicians should be able to communicate directly and securely with each other and patients via voice, video, and text using the same solution they use to access the schedule and clinical directory. Patients shouldn't have to log in or remember passwords to connect with their provider.

Final Questions

As you begin to narrow down your final selection of the best solution for your practice, ask the following:

Can the new solution centralize communication by integrating and replacing other vendors?

The more the merrier is not a concept that should apply to your vendor footprint. Unlike a live answering service, a modern practice communication solution should integrate with your EMR, clinical directory, shift schedule, and more, presenting valuable opportunities to consolidate. Find out what integrations are vital to your practice's workflows and whether or not they are supported.

Does the solution offer customized implementation, solid support, and ease of use to increase provider adoption and speed to value?

For practice communication, one size rarely fits all. Select a partner that will customize implementation, training, and support to fit your needs. Make sure they come equipped with experience in increasing provider adoption and the agility to grow and evolve with new technology and industry best practices.

Will your team have full functionality across devices and locations?

Physicians need the ability to access your communication solution whether they are in the office, at home, at the hospital, or on the move. Same for whether they use a smartphone, pager, or computer. The more device and location agnostic your communication solution is, the more accessible your practice will be to patients and staff—especially in [emergency situations](#).

Will the solution simplify the daily lives of your staff to best support patient care?

Technology that complicates daily tasks is not doing its job. While some initial effort setting up a new solution is expected, the effort is only worthwhile if it simplifies and streamlines processes moving forward. Think about reducing manual errors and misdirected calls from live answering services. Aim to minimize daily logins, information silos, and steps per workflow for providers. The long-term benefits should always justify any adjustment period for your practice.

Does the solution support and simplify patient engagement?

Patient expectations continue to grow over time, and care accessibility is becoming more and more essential as convenient healthcare options are made available. To deliver exceptional care and prevent patient leakage, practices must offer communication that is secure, direct, and flexible. The best practice management solution will integrate patient communication, inter-clinician communication, scheduling, and even the EMR.



*The more the merrier is **not** a concept that should apply to your vendor footprint.*



Conclusion

Choosing the right practice communication management solution involves several key considerations. But there is one nonnegotiable priority—your people, both patients and providers. Choosing a unified communication solution that prioritizes the needs of patients and providers will improve key business metrics for your practice while satisfying the people you serve and employ.

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[PerfectServe](#) accelerates speed to care by optimizing provider schedules, streamlining clinical communication, and engaging patients and their families in the care experience. Our cloud-based software simplifies complex clinical workflows and schedules with secure and timely communication by dynamically routing messages to the right person at the right time. We drive more efficient care collaboration in all settings to improve patient outcomes and bring joy back to caregivers. PerfectServe has 25 years of experience and is a trusted partner to more than 500 hospitals and 30,000 medical practices.

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865.212.5360

sales@perfectserve.com

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