

The Millennials Are Here. Is Health Care Ready?

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Tech savvy, coddled, social, wellness conscious – these are some of the characteristics we’ve come to associate with the millennial generation, born from the early 1980s to the early 2000s. As they enter the workforce, their needs and expectations are beginning to shape the healthcare industry. Health care is entering a time of change as it learns to communicate with and market itself to this new generation. The providers and payers that survive

or thrive will be those that adapt.

So, what do healthcare professionals need to know about millennials?

Millennials are digital natives, and, as a result, they have grown up with access to nearly every product and service right at their fingertips. Because of the internet and mobile sea-change, we’ve traded travel agents for Expedia, mail-order catalogs for Amazon, and finding friends via Facebook – and this reality is the only one millennials have ever known. Unsurprisingly, they transfer the same expectations of usability and convenience over to their healthcare, opting for accessing everything possible online and on an as-needed basis.

Many millennials came of age during the recession, getting a good deal of support from their families, not the least of which was expanded healthcare benefits through their parents, the Baby Boomers. The result is a coddled generation with poor healthcare industry literacy, with half of educated millennials unable to define “deductible.”

However, this closeness to their parents has manifested in another

striking way: millennials have a huge influence on their parents, from politics to how they interact with various industries. In the words of Micah Solomon, a contributor at Forbes, “At the rate they’re spreading the word, it won’t be long until almost everyone passes for a millennial, as far as attitude and buying patterns go.”

Millennials are fundamentally social beings. Whether being wired through Twitter and Instagram or reading and sharing opinions on Yelp, they show a desire for connection. More than any generation before, they want to be a part of workplaces that function as communities. Companies like Google and Zappos are leading the way in creating businesses with a strong workplace culture that celebrates this community, from provided communal breakfast in the cafeteria to workplace walk-runs.

These companies also innately recognize this generation’s desire for wellness, a 360-degree definition that emphasizes a work-life balance over mere physical health. In a study by the Price Waterhouse Coopers, millennials indicated they’re interested in help making healthier

choices, including programs like massage therapy (69 percent), food delivery (32 percent), and weight management (59 percent).

Millennial employees expand the definition of well-being to include physical, emotional, financial and social health, and expect employers to support them. In a *2014 Consumer Health Mindset* report, 52 percent of millennials said “living or working in a healthy environment” is influential to their personal health, over only 35 percent of Baby Boomers.

How can the healthcare industry evolve to fit the needs and expectations of the millennial generation?

Insurers and providers need to be as technologically tapped in and user-friendly as possible. According to a PwC Healthcare survey, in the last enrollment period, half of millennials and Gen X-ers looked up insurance information online, making them twice as likely to do so than seniors. Millennials prioritize convenience, preferring making appointments and receiving test results online, without the hassle of phone tag or paper trails.

The popularity and prevalence of telehealth (especially video chat with a doctor) is also rising. In PwC’s survey, over 50 percent of respondents said they would even feel comfortable sending a digital photo of a rash or skin problem to a dermatologist for an opinion.

Americans are already utilizing wearable devices like Fitbits and mobile health apps, and physicians’ next challenge will be to maximize these resources. Currently, very

few apps can be accessed by both the patient and physician; this bridge will help connection-craving millennials feel personally supported by their providers.

In general, millennials are also far less likely than previous generations to visit a primary care physician (61 percent, as opposed to 80 percent of Baby Boomers), with many preferring as-needed care at retail clinics like Zoom+Care. Recently, Zoom+Care took its successful model a step farther by opening Zoom+Specialists in Oregon. There, evaluations and procedures are scheduled online and patients do not need a referral. In line with millennials’ value of easily decipherable communication and community, visits are collaborative in nature and take place both online and in person. During and between visits patients monitor and record their progress on their phones through ZOOM+Mobile.

Providence and its Swedish affiliate recently announced an agreement with Walgreens to create immediate care clinics that aren’t just for urgent episodic care but offer coordinated care on a walk-in and same-day basis. The Providence and Swedish electronic health record platform will also connect directly to the clinics, three of which are due to open in Seattle next year. 34 percent of millennials prefer care at retail clinics, and the number is likely to continue growing.

Millennials, along with other generations, are repeatedly proving that they are likely to “shop” for healthcare in the same way they shop for a retail product. Healthcare providers and insurers that have an online presence driven by clarity,

quality, and transparency will most appeal to millennials, 76 percent of whom value reviews from other patients when selecting a doctor, according to a recent [Salesforce report](#).

As more millennials and workplaces continue to expand the definition of wellbeing, it’s important that insurance companies are able to provide innovative, competitive benefits packages. Millennials’ holistic approach means that companies need to be able to not only offer customers affordable prices but also ensure them that their acupuncturist will be in network.

Millennials are also 40 percent more likely than previous generations to spend on alternative medicine, such as acupuncture and herbal remedies, which often sidesteps the jargon they associate with the healthcare industry’s more outdated aspects. ([PwC, 2015](#))

In the coming years, providers and companies that remain competitive will be the ones that respond with nimbleness and compassion to the needs of this generation. Millennials are by nature a collaborative and sharing generation and healthcare professionals have a unique opportunity to join in, or be left behind.

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