

Your healthcare audience: patient, consumer or human?

Short Description (150-180 characters):

Patients – people – are multi-dimensional. They're patients, consumers and humans, all wrapped into one. Learn how marketing and digital teams can help audiences navigate this multi-faceted experience.

Healthcare marketers used to discuss the “patient experience” within their health system. These days the focus has shifted to “consumer experience.” The reason is obvious. Retail giants like Amazon and CVS keep pushing deeper into the healthcare space. And they're bringing retail practices and improved consumer experience with them.

It's true that before a person becomes a patient, they are a consumer – shopping around, as they would in other retail sectors – for the best healthcare option. But even before they are consumers, they are humans. People with unique motivations and challenges who don't just follow doctor's orders but act according to deeper internal impulses.

Patients – people – are multi-dimensional. They're patients, consumers and humans – all wrapped into one. But they're human first.

[Let's break down the difference between patient, healthcare consumer and human](#)

Consider the breast cancer journey. After getting a diagnosis, the first two major questions asked are:

- Am I going to live?
- How am I going to care for my family, pay the bills, etc. during treatment?

These are *human questions*.

Once she has wrapped her head around those two issues, she considers:

- Where can I find the best doctors/treatment?

This is a *consumer question* – about making decisions.

Eventually she will contemplate:

- What will be my treatment protocol?

This is a *patient question*.

Human first. Then consumer. Finally, a patient.

[Being “human-first” shows up everywhere in healthcare.](#)

Or at least it should – in person-to-person interactions, in the tone we use and the imagery we share.

But here are two concrete examples relevant to healthcare marketers:

- **Adherence to medical protocols** – To heal from a health issue or to manage a chronic condition isn't always about knowing the facts. Often, it's about overcoming challenges and creating new habits. It's about finding motivation to take the difficult steps in making change. Focusing on the

facts won't get through to the human. Instead, focus on the larger motivations that are the true reasons a person might want to create change.

- **“Stickiness”** – or brand loyalty – is about reaching the human. What do people love most about your health system? Often, it's the doctors, nurses, valets – the human connections. It's certainly not the incessant forms, the sterile environment, the deeply confusing processes. So the question becomes: *How can you bring more about what is good and beautiful and human in the healthcare experience and turn it into a larger brand connection? How can your health system apps bring personalization and connection to the healthcare experience?*

Why differentiate patient, healthcare consumer, and human?

We need to be conscious of these differences because ultimately healthcare is about humanity. It's about making people – all people – feel better, recover from sickness, enjoy wellness. Health systems must transition from “tactical fixes” and individual care encounters to a holistic patient and consumer experience that focuses on the human.

The different stages and touchpoints in a patient and consumer journey need to be better connected across all channels. That requires that silos break down between clinical services and across hospital departments (clinical and non-clinical).

In other words:

- Patient-centric care can't belong to just clinicians.
- Consumer-centric experience can't belong to just web and marketing.
- Everyone needs to understand that patients are human first.

What is the role of marketing and digital teams?

Here's how marketing and digital teams can help their audiences navigate the patient-consumer-human experience:

- **Own the voice of the consumer:** Keep the focus on the patient journey – and break down the gaps between touchpoints and address miscommunication during hand-offs. When there's pushback on issues, bring it back to the healthcare journey.
- **Focus on the “attract-serve-engage” model:** Digital properties like the website should attract patients, but also guide the patient through treatment, and continue to engage them after. Attract is mostly consumer-centric. Serve is patient-centric. Engage is mostly human-centric. But they all tie together.
- **Be actionable:** Digital functionality and content need to be increasingly actionable. Consumers aren't just seeking information; they want to take action. Make next steps clear and easy.
- **Be present:** You are the patient's, consumer's and human's trusted advisor – be there for them.

Always human first

Healthcare marketers need to focus on “patient experience” and “healthcare consumer experience.” But let's also keep our eye on the fact that first and foremost, we all are humans. And by keeping that in mind, we'll build better patient and consumer experiences, too.

Want to take the next step?

Ultimately, being human first means focusing on the [healthcare journey and healthcare personas](#) – the actual people who use your health system.

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