CASE STUDY

Children's Wisconsin Leverages Artera's Conversation Builder to Identify and Reduce Barriers to Care While Driving Meaningful Patient Interactions

- Established in 1894
- Academic Partner with the Medical College of Wisconsin
- 885 providers
- EHR: Epic

2,500
no-show follow-up responses

715
"tell us more" responses

29%
response rate

$5k
in winter gear distributed

Located in Milwaukee and Neenah, Children's Wisconsin is the region's only independent healthcare system dedicated solely to the health and well-being of children. They offer a wide range of care and support for children of all ages, including medical, dental, child and family counseling, foster care, adoption, social services, child advocacy, and injury prevention. Connecting more than 4.4 million patients and families to care each year, Children's Wisconsin is focused on making the kids of Wisconsin the healthiest in the nation — physically, socially, and mentally.

One of their priorities is to enable greater access to care and reduce any social barriers that may get in the way of receiving it. As with any large health system, no-show reduction falls into this category. "Our no-show rate has always been something we've continued to work towards lowering — it's ROI we're missing out on, and more importantly, it's children who aren't receiving the care they may need," said Courtney Miles, program manager, digital health and experience at Children's Wisconsin.

In an effort to reduce no-shows and eliminate barriers to care, Children's Wisconsin leveraged Artera's Conversation Builder, ChatAssist AI, to make significant strides within their community at large, as well as operationally within the organization.

Adopting Best Practices from Other Industries

In November 2021, various leaders at Children's Wisconsin were going through a Disparities Leadership program, where they were presented with research that made them keenly aware of health inequities in the community and across the nation. Top-of-mind for the organization, this inspired the team to identify opportunities to address social determinants of health. But it wasn't until Christopher Neuharth, vice president of experience and digital innovation at Children's Wisconsin, had his own personal experience that kickstarted the innovative thinking.

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After accidentally missing a payment at a local gas station, Neuharth received a kindly written message from the station, giving him some grace by saying something along the lines of: "We get it, we know you are busy and likely accidentally forgot to pay" but still kindly asked for the payment. Appreciative of the compassionate gesture, he thought to himself: what if we approach our no-shows like that? From there, a new idea came to life at Children's Wisconsin, specifically through their patient communication strategy.

"Christopher's personal experience really helped us think differently — and our first step was adjusting the way we communicated with our families about no-shows, taking a softer approach to say 'we get it, life happens,'" said Miles. This change in messaging went beyond just no-shows, applying to all patient interactions, both in-person or via digital communication. They use "trauma informed care approach and messaging" — a methodology they use across their system to educate staff on how to communicate appropriately with patients, encouraging them to be more cognizant of the potentially vulnerable state a patient may be in when interacting with the health system.

Using Conversation Builder to Identify Reasons for No-Shows

After identifying the challenge they were facing — no-shows — and implementing a more intentional communication strategy, the Children's Wisconsin team set out to learn more about why their patients were not showing up. "If we don't understand why patients are not showing up, we're never going to be able to move the needle on no-shows and help those families," said Miles.

Megan Sheble, senior project manager on the Health Management team at Children's Wisconsin, saw this as an opportunity to not only better understand barriers to receiving care but also as a way to get more connected with the families they serve. Artera was the modality to do just that, piloting the Conversation Builder workflow at five primary care clinics in the metro area, where there are higher numbers of underserved or uninsured populations. "I really see Artera as another modality to help me more deeply engage and connect with patients," said Sheble.

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The workflow prompts no-show patients with a message asking them to pick one of five options for no-showing: transportation issues, forgot, date and time did not work, took family elsewhere, or other. This message takes a more delicate, softer approach, giving grace to the patient's family and politely asking for a reason why they may not have shown up. Those who reply with "other" are then followed up with another automated message, "tell us more," asking them if they'd like to provide details.

"It's really in that field that we find families are most willing to provide us with a lot of information — they're very free with their texting, offering up some pretty vulnerable details. That has allowed us to identify the true reasons for why patients are no-showing," said Miles.

Data Enables Them to Reduce Barriers to Care

Using Analytics Plus to quantify and analyze the responses patients provided, they identified numerous reasons they had not anticipated. One of the responses, in particular, stuck out to the Children's Wisconsin team: "My kids do not have coats" — a major deterrent for patients facing the brisk winters in Wisconsin.

At the same time, the team also realized their no-show rates were jumping up in the winter months, so they couldn't help but wonder if other families were also facing similar challenges. Based on these insights, Children's Wisconsin was quick to take action: in 2022 alone, they proactively purchased 163 coats and 180 hats and gloves, distributing them to five primary care clinics — providing more than $5,000 in winter gear to patients in need. This is now something they plan to do every year moving forward — it's not only a testament to their dedication to the well-being of their patients and families but also to innovative thinking. "It's not just about getting them to their appointments — we want them to be warm wherever they're going. And one person identifying that need caused us to serve so many more. That's just how we function," said Miles.

The workflow data also helped them identify another barrier: up to 45 percent of patients seeking care at the Milwaukee hospital campus — historically more vulnerable clinics — were disclosing that their missed appointment was due to transportation issues. Being able to dial in on location and practice-specific data through Analytics Plus has helped them identify which clinics are seeing the greatest social challenges. "As a health system, that allows us to prioritize patients who are being scheduled at our Milwaukee hospital campus; we can then proactively try and assist in transportation coordination if we want our patients to show up. That's how we can decrease our missed appointment rate," said Sheble. "There is system awareness now that transportation is a patient need. And because of this data, we're making headway on closing these gaps by asking questions earlier in the workflow, upon scheduling."

Improving Operational Workflows

In addition to better understanding barriers to care, the data has also enabled them to identify opportunities for operational improvements. For example, the team saw patient responses such as: "I called to cancel," which made them more aware of what staff were and were not doing — whether it was checking the Artera platform, listening to voicemails, or reviewing emails. The team then came together to see if other internal steps could be added to ensure patients were not just being checked off as a no-show if they attempted to cancel or reschedule beforehand.

Additionally, they were also able to identify undeliverable messages via the Conversation Builder workflow report, which encouraged them to push a staff reminder to verify phone numbers when registering families. "If they didn't get the message, they likely didn't get an appointment reminder. If we can eliminate these small oversights, it can help reduce no-shows," said Miles.

Something else that informed change management was patient feedback, as they realized a huge dissatisfier was how clinics handled late shows to their appointments — something that was not consistent across the system. They were ultimately able to work with each clinic to develop messaging for staff to be able to handle late shows to appointments, ensuring consistent information was distributed enterprise-wide.

What's Next for Children's Wisconsin and Artera

It's safe to say the Conversation Builder workflow has been successful. Not only did they roll it out across

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all primary care clinics in July 2022 but they're now going enterprise-wide in Fall of 2023. Once live across the organization, they're hoping to track their no-show rates more closely over time, ideally servicing more patients and capturing additional revenue. One other enhancement they're hoping to make will be giving patients the option to text back to reschedule — something that will be a huge satisfier for providers looking to fill more slots, especially in the ambulatory world.

Above all, Children's Wisconsin is focused on driving greater access to care. And they're using Artera to support those efforts. "If we can effectively communicate with our families and get them important information from the health system, that is a win," said Sheble. "Having a tool like Artera to be able to identify problems for us to respond to allows us to be innovative. While we can't fix all of the problems, it challenges us to think differently, do more and really meet our patients where they're at."

The Results

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