

# New Report Identifies Shared Drivers of Patient Loyalty and Physician Engagement in the Medical Practice Setting

By Diana Mahoney

With market consolidation and increased consumerism, attracting and retaining patients is a top-of-mind challenge facing medical practice leaders. At the same time, the importance of creating and maintaining a culture that allows physicians to stay connected to their purpose, their “why,” in the face of multiple external stressors such as regulatory changes, administrative burdens, and resource limitations is increasingly understood to be foundational to practice success.

While these two considerations seem to be independent, research has shown that performance on measures of patient loyalty and physician engagement is highly interrelated. Now, data presented in a new [report](#) indicate that there is meaningful overlap between the underlying drivers of both, suggesting there is a common improvement path for meeting patient and physician needs.

The report, [A Unified Approach to Driving Patient and Physician Loyalty](#), examined primary indicators for patient loyalty from the patient experience survey results of more than 2.1 million medical practice patients (as well as 1.3 million inpatients and more than 285,000 emergency department patients). The analyses showed that, in the medical practice setting, patients were most likely to recommend their doctor based on caregiver teamwork, followed by their perception that clinicians had respect for what they had to say, and the overall courtesy shown throughout the practice.

Many of these same themes—teamwork, respect, responsiveness—emerged in a review of the items that most powerfully drive physician engagement. For example, engagement survey items such as “My work unit works well together,” “There is effective teamwork between physicians and nurses,” and “There is a climate of trust in this organization” all influence physicians’ engagement in their work and loyalty to their organizations.

In the report, these insights are considered in the context of an adaptation of the Why–How–What framework described by Simon Sinek in his 2009 TED Talk, “How Great Leaders Inspire Action.” Sinek observed that leaders and organizations that inspire loyalty are guided by their purpose, their “why.” Once organizations clearly articulate and believe their “why,” they can focus on the “how”—the specific actions that will deliver on their mission—which in turn leads to the outcome, or the “what.”

In health care, the universal “why” of caregivers is to reduce patients’ suffering by meeting their needs for safe, high-quality, compassionate care, and data show that both patient and physician loyalty are tied to perceptions of care quality. Both patient loyalty and physician engagement are also influenced by the “how.” How can we reduce suffering? How do we deliver safe, high-quality, patient-centered care? How do we perform at a high level consistently and reliably? The patient and physician loyalty drivers described above demonstrate the degree to which both groups value these considerations.

## AT A GLANCE

- In an analysis of 2018 patient experience survey results from more than 2.1 million medical practice patients, perceptions of teamwork and care coordination, feeling heard by physicians, and being treated with courtesy emerged as top drivers of performance on the global “Likelihood to Recommend” measure, which is considered to be a proxy for patient loyalty.
- The patient loyalty drivers overlap with many of the physician engagement survey domains that most powerfully drive physician commitment, including collaboration across the care team, a strong partnership with the health care organization, and a culture of trust and respect.
- Improvement strategies focused on these shared drivers can accelerate transformational change by exerting influence on multiple performance domains.

This insight can be used to accelerate transformation, beginning with the “why” and focusing closely on the following key “how” considerations that will likely have the most profound rising-tide effect based on the shared performance drivers:

- Care coordination and teamwork
- An environment of compassion, trust, and respect
- Support for physicians’ capacity to deliver safe, high-quality care
- Communication that makes patients feel heard and physicians feel valued

Identifying and focusing on these considerations in a culture of continuous improvement requires regularly measuring progress using patient experience and physician engagement surveys, communicating outcomes, and adapting as needed, according to the report.

“Our data show that if organizations get the ‘why’ right and the ‘how’ right, patient and physician loyalty and engagement follows,” said Press Ganey Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Thomas H. Lee. “There’s a meaningful overlap of goals between the true values of patients and clinicians and business values. There is a virtuous cycle in which, if patients have a better experience with their care, personnel have greater pride in their organizations and their own work, and they are more likely to express a desire to stay. And organizations need and want their personnel to stay so that they can develop and maintain a High Reliability culture, which is foundational to delivering consistently safe, high-quality, patient-centered care.”