



2022 Patient Engagement Report

Provider Perspectives on Optimizing
Patient Scheduling and Communication

RELATIENT

in partnership with
MGMA

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About This Report

This survey was developed to better understand provider perspectives on patient engagement, staffing related to scheduling and access, and other related challenges.

We set out to discover three things about patient scheduling and communication:

1. Identify the top challenges providers face
2. Assess common strategies used to meet these challenges
3. Understand technology adoption

Individuals in C-suite, executive, and other senior positions were invited to take this survey online via email. In total, the survey collected responses from 359 individuals, 217 of which submitted completed questionnaires.

Responses were collected between August 9th and 25th of 2022.



Automating Patient Scheduling and Engagement in the New Era of Healthcare

Meeting the challenge of high consumer expectations, increased complexity, and ongoing staffing shortages

In a healthcare environment forever changed by the COVID-19 pandemic, provider groups of all sizes share a common challenge: how to meet increasing consumer demand with rising complexity amid the new reality of administrative staffing shortages.

Patient engagement technology is widely available to provider groups, but our research found that while many provider groups have implemented solutions to provide consumer-friendly scheduling and communication functionality, such as text reminders with the ability to cancel or reschedule an appointment, patients have not yet fully adopted them (e.g., the majority of patients still rely heavily on human phone calls to schedule or change appointments). Consequently, healthcare organizations remain labor-dependent at a time when administrative staffing shortages present significant challenges.

Our research identified three primary characteristics of patient scheduling and engagement that are critical to provide a high quality healthcare consumer experience but also prone to cause trouble if providers do not manage and monitor these areas carefully.



Challenge 1:

Patient Scheduling Relies Heavily on Human Interaction

Resolution: Leverage comprehensive scheduling solutions that offer intelligent rules-based workflows to manage provider preferences for both patient self-scheduling and contact center scheduling.

Today's providers recognize that patient scheduling is the most critical part of patient experience. About half (47%) of provider organizations rate patient scheduling as their organization's "most important" patient experience function; 75% rate quality of patient scheduling and communication as "very important."

Importance of Scheduling Quality for Overall Patient Experience



Very important

Fairly important

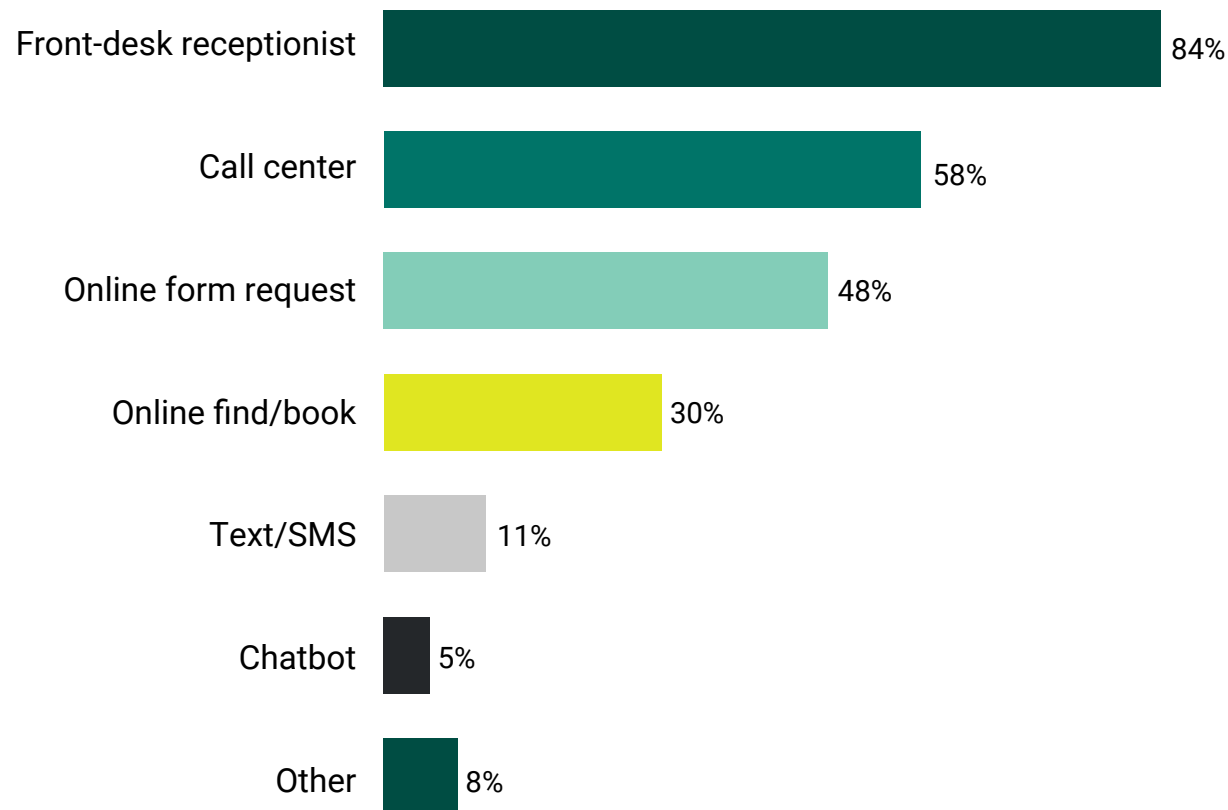
Important

Slightly important

Not at all important

In large part, patients still pick up the phone to make an appointment: 84% of providers say patients schedule appointments with the front desk, and a bit more than half (58%) say patients schedule through a call center. (The use of call centers was most common for practices with 100+ physicians.)

Patient Scheduling

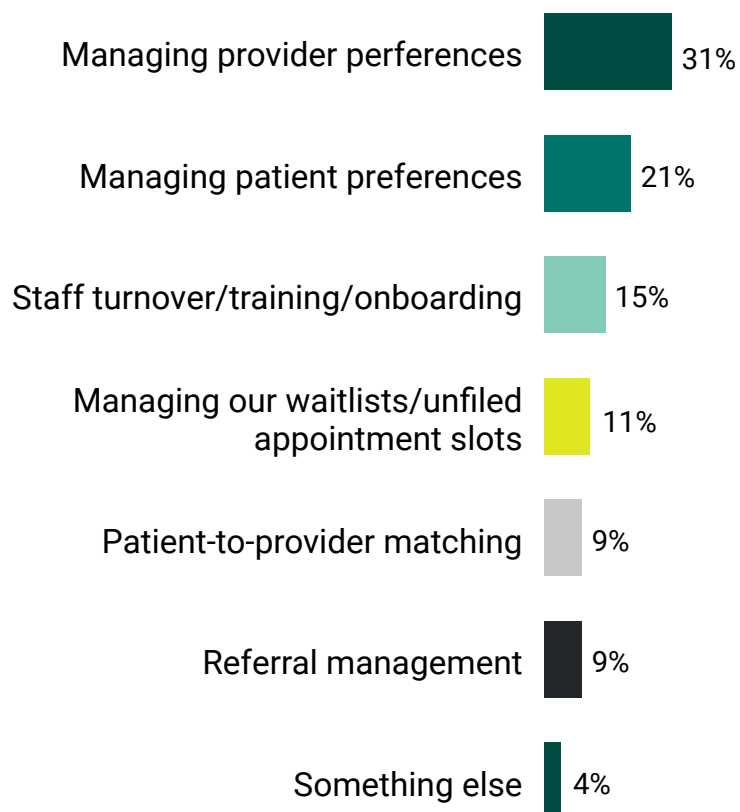


75% of providers rate quality of patient scheduling and communication as a “very important” part of the patient experience; almost half (47%) rate it as “most important.”

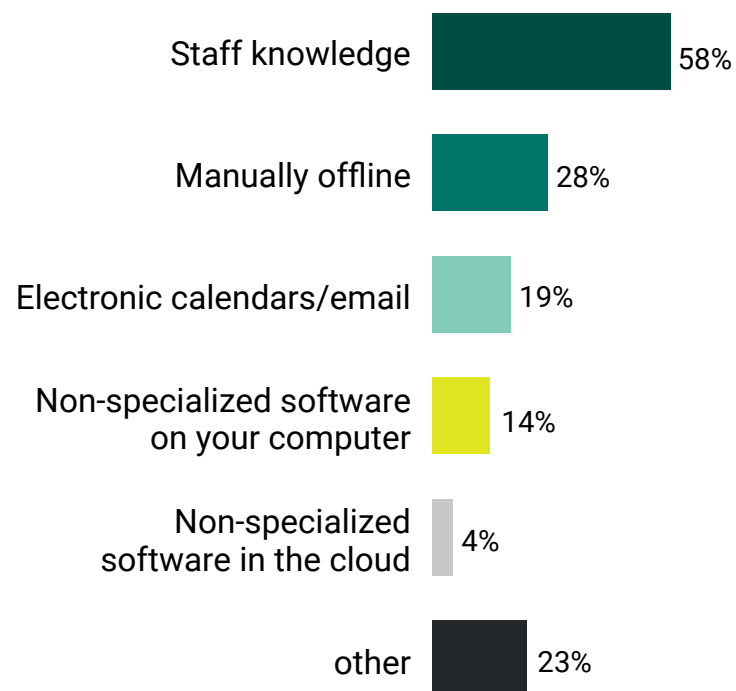
Managing provider preferences is the top scheduling challenge, according to 31% of executives surveyed. Notably, 58% rely on internal staff knowledge (vs. automated rules) to navigate the issue—a high-risk problem when staff turnover occurs.

Other top priorities for scheduling improvement include improving online scheduling for better patient self-service, improving ability to fill available appointment slots, reducing no-shows and cancellations, reducing manual workflows with automated rules/preferences, and decreasing call center wait time.

Top Scheduling Challenges Experienced



Management of Provider and Patient Preferences to Schedule Appointments

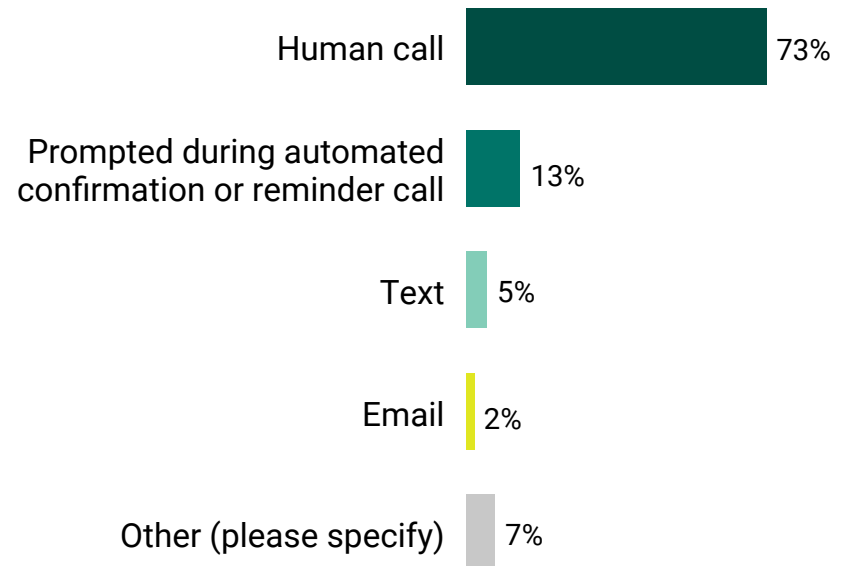


Challenge 2:

Patients Still Rely on Phone Calls

Resolution: Expand patient engagement solutions to ensure they focus not only on outbound communications with patients, but also on driving patients to alternative channels for standard inquiries such as appointment confirmation, cancellation or rescheduling, prescription refills, and directions. Explore real-time automated engagement solutions: An online chatbot, for instance, can service standard interactions and dynamically route only the chats that require human interaction.

How Patients Cancel/Reschedule Appointments



Most provider groups are leveraging outbound automated communications (text, human call, automated call, or email). Some 60% of organizations surveyed send mass patient messages, and about half (52%) send targeted/segmented messages. Most providers (96%) are not yet utilizing automated chat.

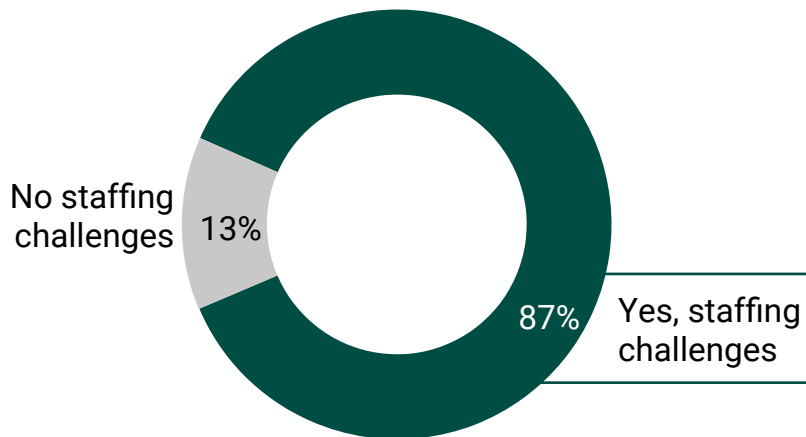
Yet even with these tools in place, 73% of patients are still calling to cancel or reschedule, which requires human staff. Notably, those providers who do leverage automated appointment reminders report lower no-show rates.

Challenge 3:

Labor Dependencies and Staffing Shortages Impact Staff and Patient Experience

Resolution: Seek scheduling and engagement solutions that augment and support your staff. Such solutions should handle standard patient interactions by automating configurable rules to ensure patients' needs are met while routing only interactions that require human touch. These solutions, such as intelligent scheduling and dynamic chat, both reduce burden on current administrative staff and speed onboarding time for future staff.

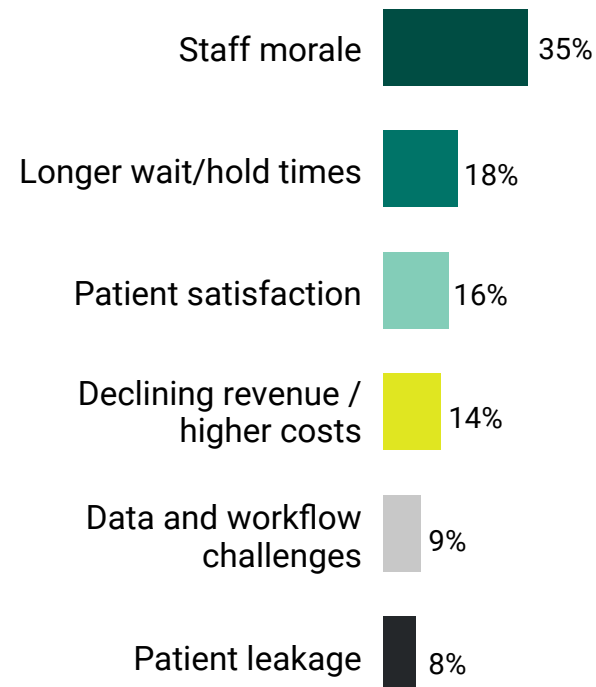
Administrative staffing challenges



A full 87% of executives say they've faced administrative staffing challenges over the last 12 months. Of those, one third (35%) found those staffing challenges have had a negative impact on staff morale, and about one in six (18%) noted it has led to longer wait times.

About one in seven (16%) providers add that staffing shortages have had a negative impact on the patient experience in their organization. Almost four in ten (39%) providers report it takes more than four weeks to onboard new staff.

Negative Impacts of Staffing Shortages



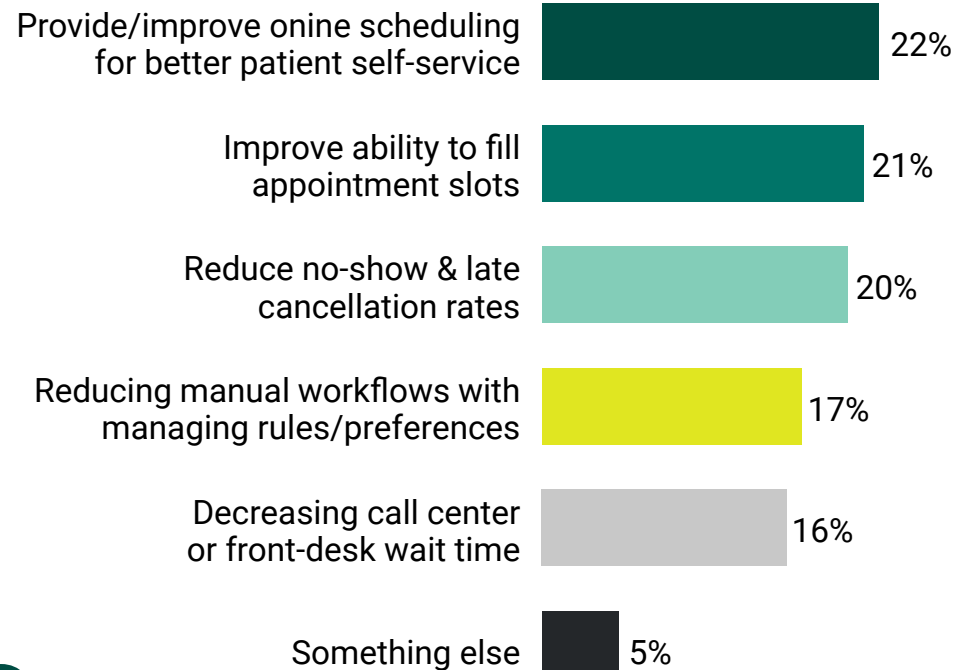
Planning a Response

In assessing how best to address their challenges, provider groups are divided. Executives cite contact center scheduling (24%) and online patient self-scheduling (23%) as their biggest priorities.

The price of a solution is cited by most organizations (44%) as having the most significant impact when making a buying decision. After cost, the most significant impact on provider purchasing decisions is the ability to integrate with practice management solutions or an EMR (25%).

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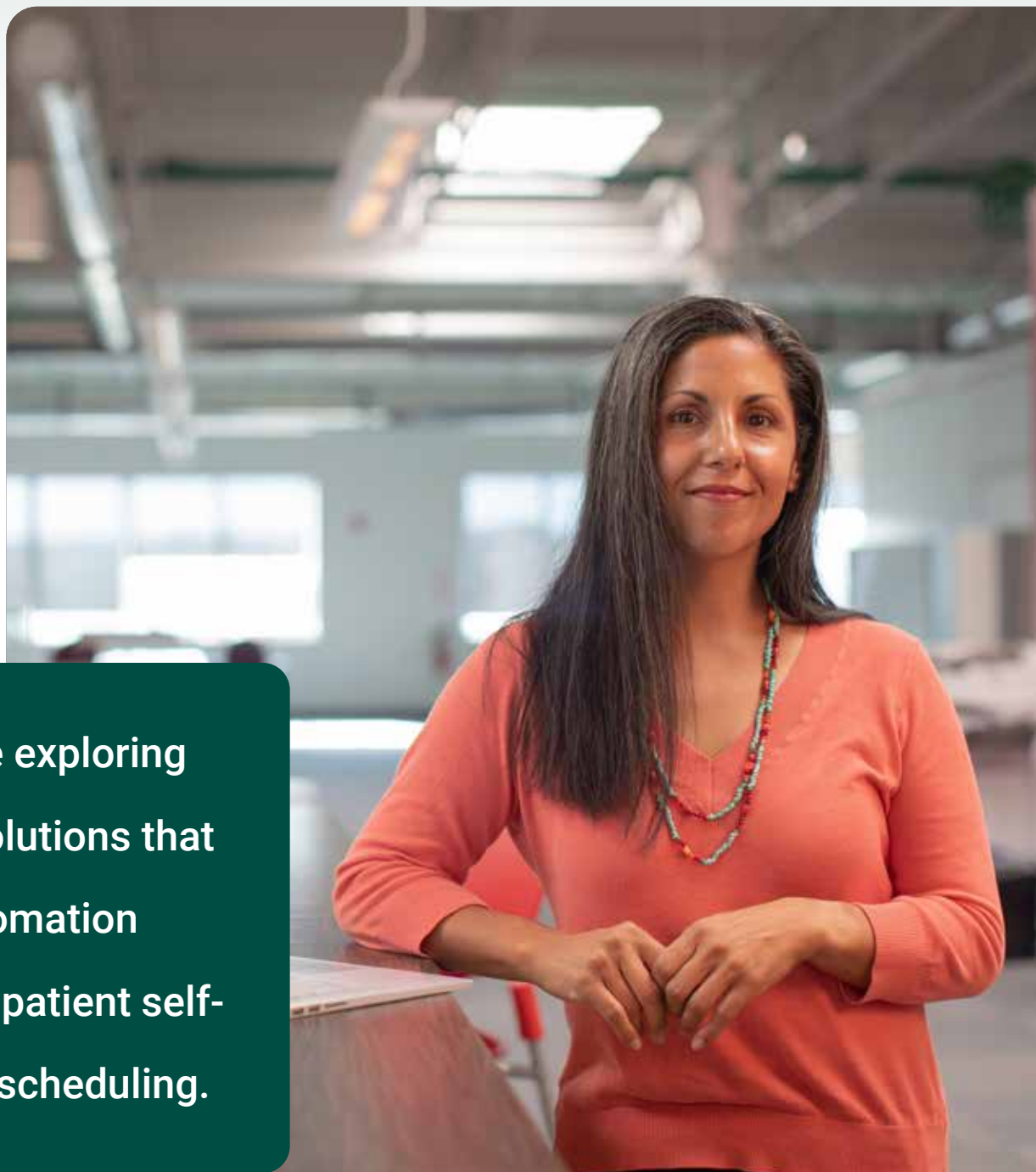
Priorities to improve scheduling



Forward-thinking providers are exploring comprehensive scheduling and engagement solutions that use the same configurable automation rules and logic to support both patient self-scheduling and contact center scheduling, as well as the associated patient communication (confirmations, reminders, follow ups, recalls, etc).

The good news is there are modern technologies designed to improve both patient engagement and operational efficiency. These solutions can help ensure patient appointment volumes remain high even amidst an economic downturn.

Forward-thinking providers are exploring scheduling and engagement solutions that use the same configurable automation rules and logic to support both patient self-scheduling and contact center scheduling.



Looking Forward

We can expect providers to continue to focus on doing more with less. Economic concerns prevail: 82% of executives cited economic pressure as having the highest impact on their operations related to patient scheduling and communication, while 76% cited consumerism.

Since respondents indicate scheduling is the top factor in establishing a positive patient experience, solutions such as intelligent online self-scheduling, connected call center scheduling, and chatbot-assisted scheduling are poised for significant market adoption in 2023.

Provider groups will also continue to leverage automated outbound communications such as appointment reminders. In doing so, they should evaluate better ways for patients to ask questions, cancel, or reschedule appointments in an automated channel to reduce staff burden.

Patient demand for a simple consumer experience is at an all-time high. As Relatient's COO Emily Tyson has noted, today's provider groups need to be focused on finding the best ways to both keep physicians focused on top of practice work and working at full capacity.

The question to be answered in 2023 is: How quickly and adeptly will provider groups lean into technology to meet the challenge of high consumer expectations while alleviating the burden of today's staffing shortage?

About The Respondents

~80% of respondents hold executive roles

Job roles



■ Executive/C-Level/VP

■ Physician

■ Clinician (Nurse, NP, etc)

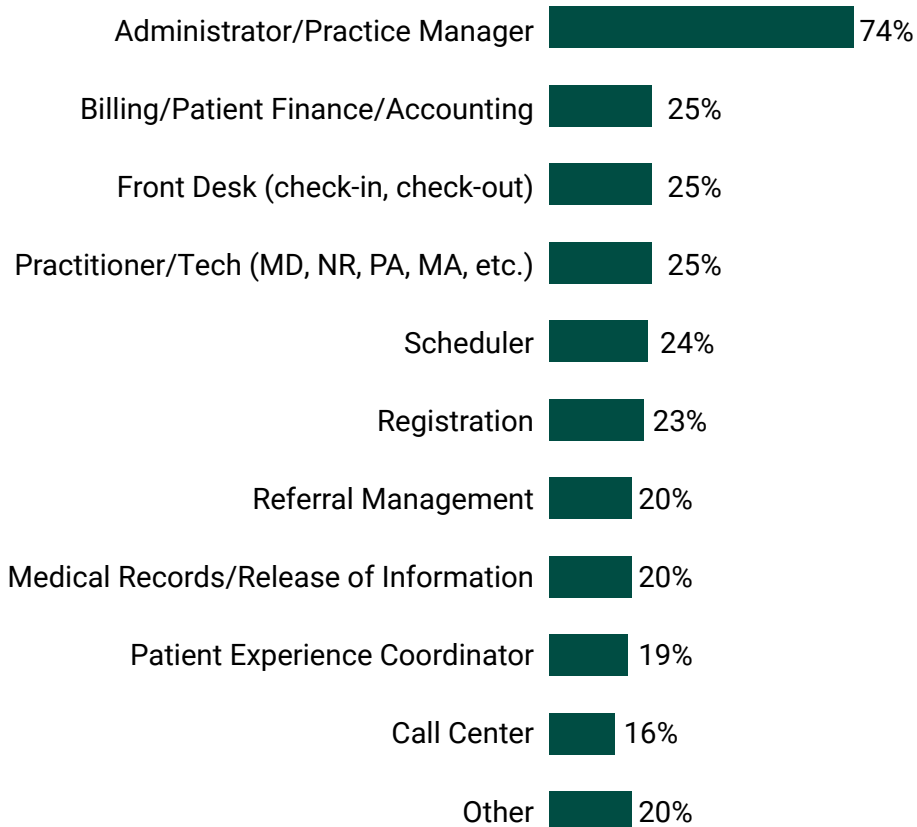
■ Administrative Staff

■ Other (please specify)

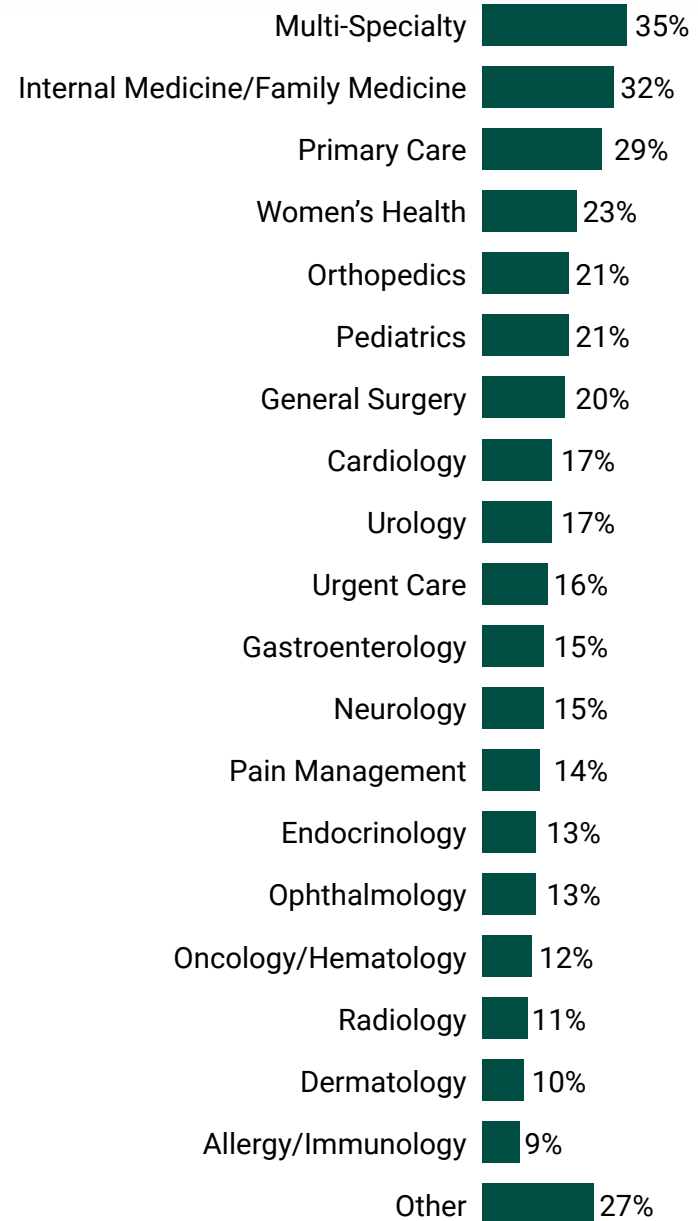


75% of respondents perform administrator or practice manager job functions from a wide range of specialties

Job function(s) performed or overseen

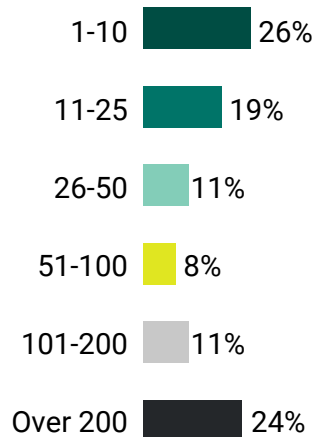


Organization's Medical Specialty

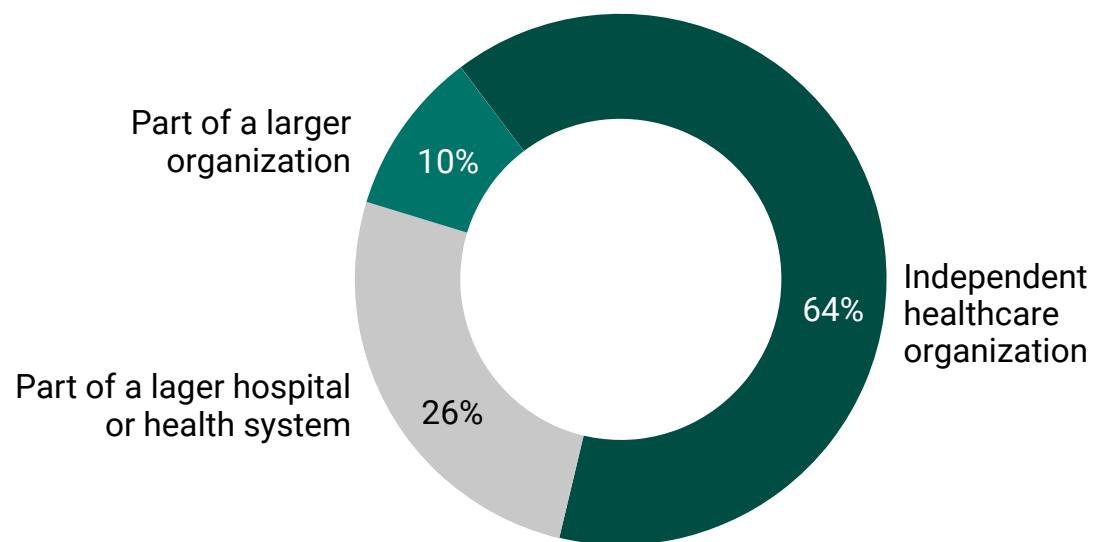


Most respondents came from organizations with more than 25 FTE physicians – 64% independent organizations

Number of Physicians in Organization

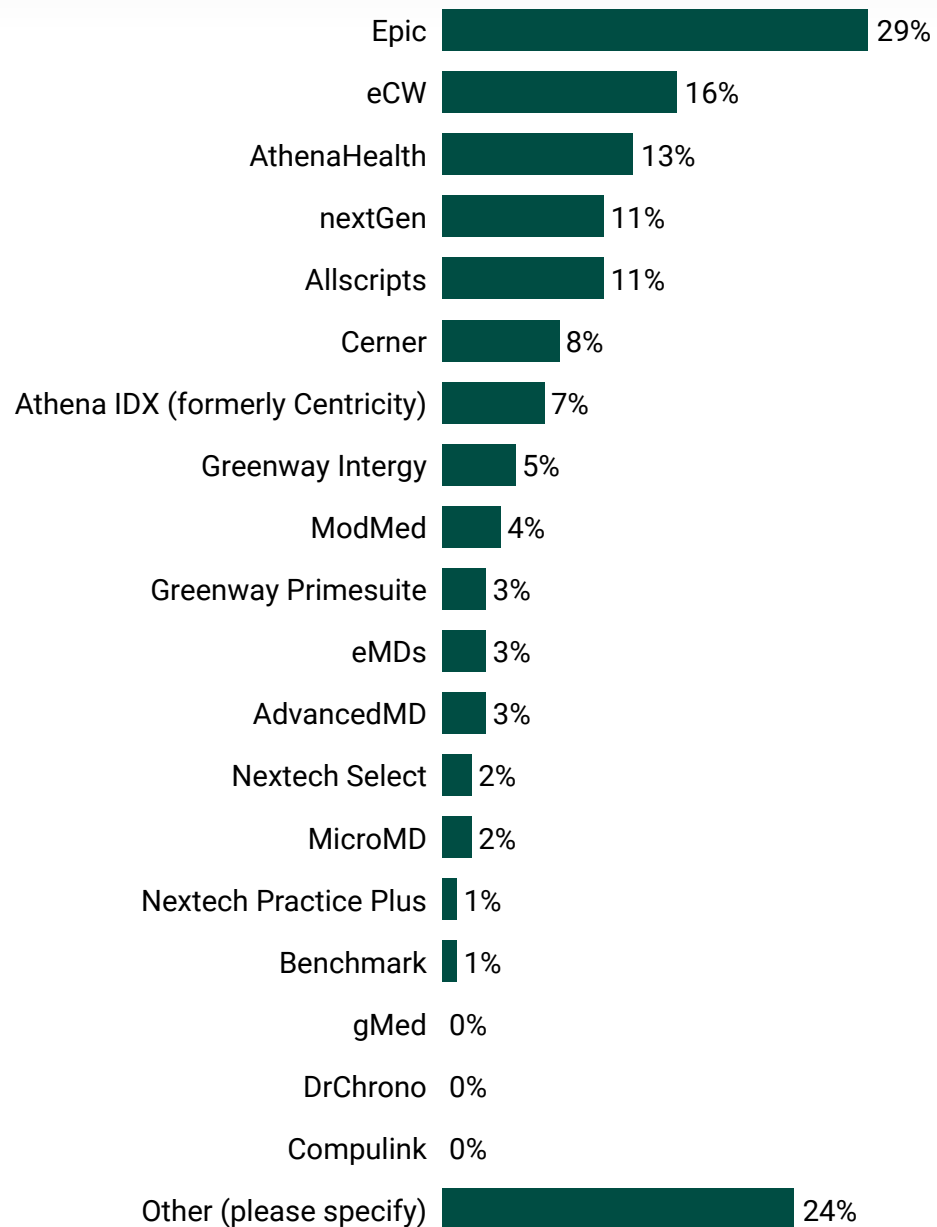


Organization Type



Epic was the most used practice management system, with nearly one third reporting its use

Respondent EHR/PM System



About Relatient

Relatient, Inc., is a leading patient scheduling and engagement technology company that utilizes a intelligent mobile-first approach to improving access to care. Integrating with all leading EHR/PM systems, Relatient engages with over 50 million unique patients per year on behalf of provider groups and health systems across the U.S. Relatient's self-scheduling, patient messaging, chat, digital registration and payment solutions drive operational efficiency, increased appointments, reduced no-shows, faster patient payments and improved patient satisfaction, all while supporting better health and care quality initiatives.

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