Prioritizing Client Engagement to Promote Better Outcomes

Introduction: The Importance of Client Engagement

Nearly one in five adults live with a mental health condition in the United States alone.[1] Despite the prevalence of behavioral health conditions that range from mild to severe, challenges still exist in providing adequate care for this unique population. From broadening access to care to providing whole-person care for their clients, behavioral health and human services organizations face a number of challenges when it comes to serving individuals with behavioral health conditions.

One of the key ways in which organizations can improve outcomes for the people they serve is by focusing on client engagement. Client engagement refers to an approach in which clients take an active role in making decisions about their healthcare and treatment plan. This approach helps clients become more engaged and more likely to stick with a care plan, which ultimately improves their outcomes.

In the 2021 Work Tech Report, 52% of human services professionals see **client engagement** as an area their **organization could improve.**

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In this day and age, we're no longer confined to a traditional care setting in which a client must travel to the provider location to receive care. With telehealth taking off, providers have more options for how, where, and when they provide care. Telehealth can improve access to care for those who are unable or unwilling to travel to a specific location. By meeting clients where they're at, behavioral health organizations are improving access to care – helping clients get the care they need in the manner that's most convenient for them.

At the same time, it's important to remember that some clients prefer in-person care and are more comfortable communicating with providers face-to-face. Additionally, some clients may not have access to reliable internet, or suitable devices for connecting virtually, making an in-person visit necessary to receive care.

Technology can help behavioral health organizations in a number of ways to improve access to care. Telehealth is the most obvious example here, but there are others as well. Telehealth involves a secure platform that allows providers and clients to communicate so that clients can receive the care they need remotely. Additionally, technology can help with scheduling appointments and automating reminders, helping providers and clients find a time that works for everyone and then reducing the likelihood of a no-show.

Disengaged patients are 3x as likely to have **unmet medical needs** and 2x as likely to **delay medical care.**

Hibbard & Green

Helping clients become active participants in their own care only helps improve outcomes. Clients are more likely to engage in their treatment plan when given options that are tailored to their needs and letting them be part of the decision-making process.[2] In behavioral health especially, it's important for providers to recognize that each client is unique and has unique behavioral health needs. A one-size-fits-all approach will almost certainly fall short of producing the desired outcomes. And what worked for one individual may not be suitable for someone else, even with the same condition or challenges.

The more personalized the care is and the more a client can make decisions about the care that will be best for them, the better the outcomes can be. To help clients in this area, it's important not just to provide easy access to care but also to provide access to their own health information. This shouldn't require calling the provider or making an appointment. Instead, clients should have access to their information whenever and wherever they need it. Providers are increasingly using online patient portals to provide exactly that.

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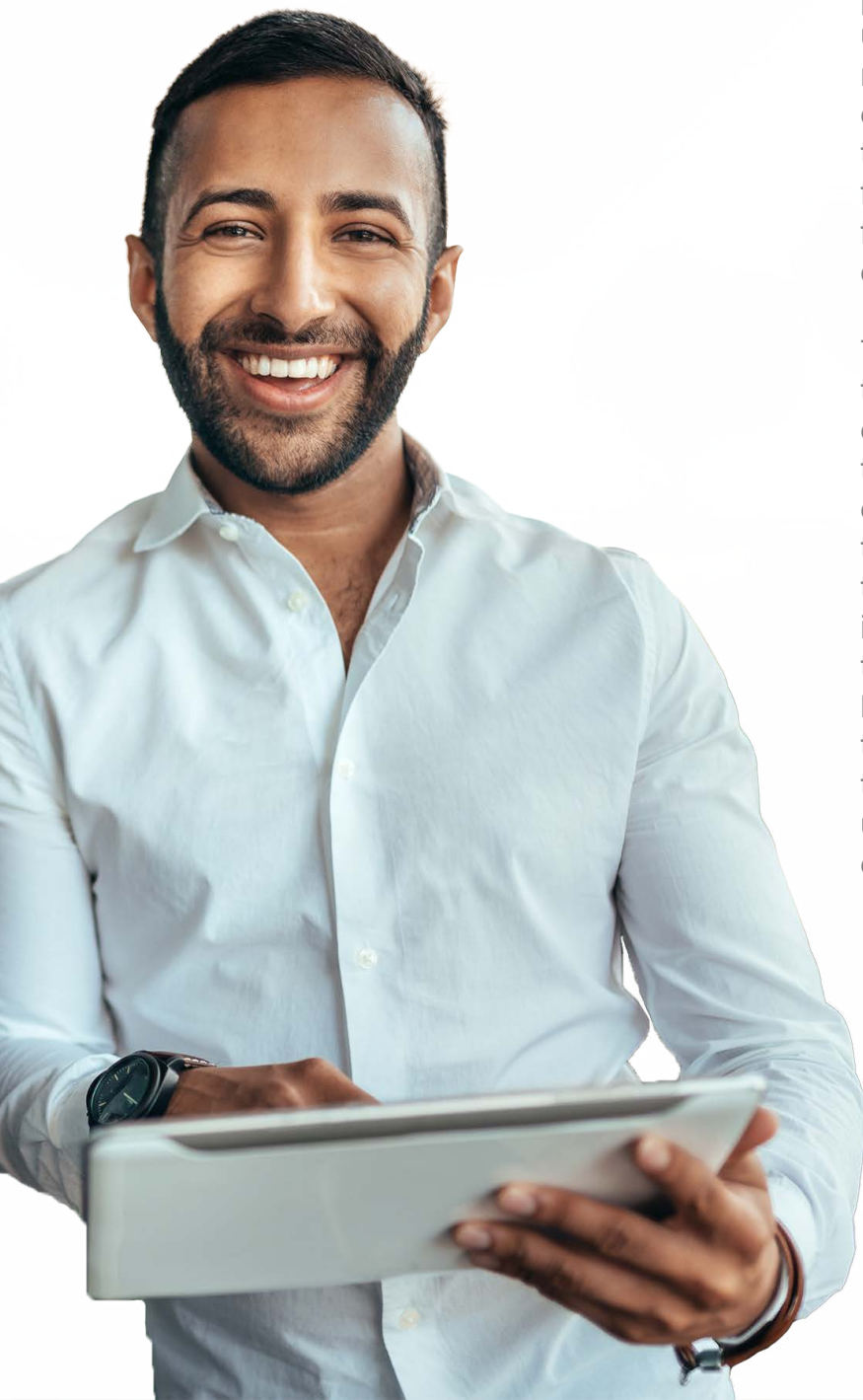
While the most basic patient portal may only be used to request an appointment, a more robust platform can provide the client with additional information and functionality, such as:

- Summaries of past visits
- Medical history
- Medication lists and refill requests
- Online bill pay

- HIPAA-compliant secure messaging
- Appointment reminders
- Documents and forms
- Educational materials[3]

Providing clients with information about their own health and care plan, along with supplementary educational materials that help them understand their options, supports their agency in making the decisions that are best for them.[4]

Access to a patient portal can be further enabled through the use of mobile apps that make it easy for clients to find the information they need and so that it's always available when they want it.

Recognizing and Treating the Whole Person

The connection between behavioral health and physical health is also well-documented.[5] Therefore, the best outcomes stem from holistic treatment plans that provide whole-person care. Instead of treating each condition independently of the others, providing care that understands how each condition causes or influences another can allow for better outcomes and a more consistent experience for the client.

This can be accomplished through interoperability, which refers to the exchange of information among different providers.[6] This may include behavioral healthcare providers, physical healthcare providers, labs, hospitals, pharmacies, and of course, the client. By sharing healthcare information across care providers, interoperability allows for a true continuum of care for the client. With a more consistent care plan that addresses the whole person, the client can better engage with and understand how each component of their care plan contributes to their whole care.

> "Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, **involve me and I learn.**"

Xun Kuang, Xunzi

Conclusion: The Path to Better Outcomes

The path to better outcomes begins and ends with the client. The best treatment plan will not produce the desired outcomes without the client's willingness and interest in following it. Therefore, providing care in a way that works best for the individual and best engages the individual in their own care can only help improve those outcomes.

Increasingly, technology is providing innovative solutions that change the way we can communicate, deliver care, and provide access to care. When used to enable and expand upon the high-quality care that behavioral health providers have already been providing, it opens up new opportunities to meet clients where they're at, engage them in the decision-making process of their own care, and ensure a holistic approach that recognizes and treats the whole person.

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About ContinuumCloud

ContinuumCloud offers a spectrum of cloud-based software solutions intentionally designed to meet the unique needs of the behavioral health and human services industry. These solutions include an EHR platform, powered by Welligent, and an HCM system, powered by DATIS HR Cloud. Through these offerings, ContinuumCloud empowers organizations to provide high-quality care and deliver on their mission.

Have questions?
We have answers.

Contact us at any time by emailing hello@continuumcloud.com or call us directly at 877.386.1355.