

A large, stylized orange arrow pointing to the right, composed of two parallel lines that taper towards the tip.

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Insight Driven Health

Silver Surfers are Catching the eHealth Wave

How Healthcare Providers can Attract and Engage the Aging Population through Digital Channels

Every year, approximately 650,000 people in the UK turn 65 and the number of 65+ year olds is projected to rise by nearly 50% to over 16 million over the next 20 years.¹ With this trend expected to continue for the next 20 years, health providers are in no position to ignore the aging population.² What many do not know is just how digitally savvy the elderly patients are—or how important it is today to use ehealth to engage with them.

Digital has no age limit

The digital revolution is not just for the young; the era of the silver surfer is here. According to the Office for National Statistics, Internet use more than tripled among those 65 years and older and nearly doubled among 55 to 64 year olds between 2006 and 2013. The greatest growth in Internet use among all age groups during this period was among those 65 years and over.²

Digital is clearly becoming part of the fabric of life for the elderly population. Forty-four percent of elderly Americans are using the Internet to send and receive emails, and 41 percent are using it to find information about goods and services. More than a tenth (11 percent) are active on Facebook, Twitter or other social media sites.³



Digitally savvy in their everyday lives, elderly Americans are also going online when it comes to healthcare. Searching for health information online is the only area where Internet use of the elderly population surpasses that of 18 to 29 year olds.⁴ Though the figures originate in the US, Accenture research shows similar trends in the UK and other European countries.⁵

Getting personal

The elderly want to do more than access general healthcare information online. They want online access to their personal health information, and many want to research and evaluate health insurance options, accessing their information once enrolled. The 2013 Accenture Consumer Survey on Patient Engagement polled more than 9,000 adults in nine countries, including about 200 patients of 65 and older in England and revealed that:

- Most (60 percent) respondents 65 and older say that accessing their medical information online is very or somewhat important.
- 72 percent of elderly consumers in England think that they should have full access to their electronic health records - however, only 7 percent actually do today.

Making connections

eHealth options are also influencing how elderly consumers want to connect with their healthcare team. Sixty-four percent of older Britons say it is somewhat or very important to request prescription refills electronically, however only 50 percent of them can do so today.

¹ National population projections for UK, 2010-based (principle projection), Office for National Statistics, 2011

² National population projections, 2010-based, Office for National Statistics, 2011

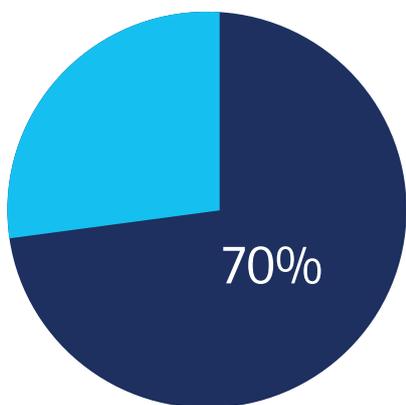
³ 2012 Accenture Consumer Survey on Patient Engagement

⁴ Pew Internet & American Life Project, Older Adults and Internet Use, Aaron Smith, April 3, 2014, accessed 10/7/13, http://www.pewinternet.org/files/2014/04/PIP_Seniors-and-Tech-Use_040314.pdf

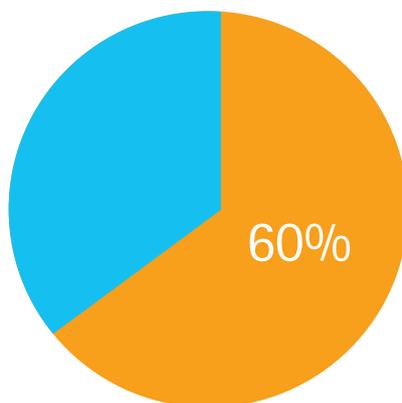
⁵ 2012 Accenture Consumer Survey on Patient Engagement

Older consumers need or expect ehealth options from the doctors and hospitals where they go for care

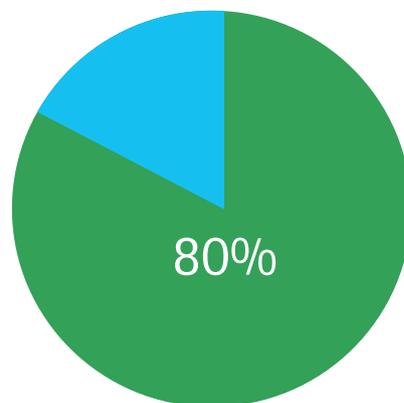
"How important is it to you personally that each of the following electronic capabilities is offered by your medical provider where you receive medical care?"



Seventy percent of English patients of all ages say it is at least somewhat important to be able to access their medical records electronically



In England, 60% of respondents say it is at least somewhat important to be able to communicate with their medical providers via secure email.



80% of English consumers feel it is important (very or somewhat) to be able to manage their appointments electronically.

SOURCE: 2013 Accenture Consumer Survey on Patient Engagement

In addition, according to the Consumer Survey on Patient Engagement, 77 percent of elderly consumers in England believe it is somewhat or very important to be able to book appointments online. Nearly half (46 percent) say it is somewhat or very important to communicate with providers via secure email. Considering these findings, should healthcare providers play a role in helping to facilitate digital connections with elderly consumers?

eHealth's broader appeal

These insights show older patients' interest and engagement in ehealth for health information and clinical data sharing, as well as for meeting care delivery and pharmacy needs. They also suggest a potential role for ehealth in other areas of the health provider lifecycle such as marketing, sales and customer service.

For those purchasing private healthcare insurance, conventional wisdom says the elderly want to connect with a "real" person to purchase insurance. Even if digital is not the channel of choice at the point of purchase, the use of ehealth may impact buying decisions before purchase and inform service expectations after. With so many silver surfers online, how could it not?

Meeting the rising tide

The digital divide between older and younger segments of the population is disappearing. Not only are today's older consumers digitally savvy, 55 to 64 year olds aging into the elderly population have even higher digital use rates, and are poised to drive adoption as they age.

To serve the aging population—today and into tomorrow—healthcare providers must pursue digital channels to influence buying behavior, engagement and satisfaction:

- **Patient choice.** Digital is vital when it comes to customer preference and differentiation among treatment providers. Value and brand are also becoming increasingly important for patient choices.

- **Engagement.** Digital dialogue with older patients can mean better outcomes and healthier living. Smart digital health management also helps providers reduce medical costs and close the patient experience gap, improving retention.
- **Satisfaction.** Digital can improve healthcare quality with a more seamless, collaborative health ecosystem. It can also help providers create simplified, accessible patient experiences that people share via social networks.
- **Silver surfers are keen to ride the ehealth wave.** Healthcare providers must do the same. It is no longer a question of if. It is a question of how—and when.

For more information, please contact:

Aimie Chapple

aimie.s.chapple@accenture.com

Julika Erfurt

julika.erfurt@accenture.com

Methodology

For its [2013 Consumer Survey on Patient Engagement](#), Accenture conducted consumer research with 9,015 adults across nine countries (Australia, Brazil, Canada, England, France, Germany, Singapore, Spain and the United States), including about 200 older consumers (ages 65+) in England, assessing their perceptions of using digital tools to manage their own healthcare. Where relevant, these findings were compared to Accenture's 2012 [Healthcare Consumer Research](#) and the [Accenture Doctors Survey](#).

