In a Press Ganey analysis of 350,000 comments from ED and medical practice patients between January 1 and March 20, 2020, the number of comments mentioning COVID-19 has grown at an average rate of 134% each week from early February through mid-March.

To identify emerging themes and provide insights and recommendations to provider organizations, we isolated and analyzed the nearly 12,000 COVID-19–related comments, generating approximately 27,000 insights and leading to the following observations.

**Observations from Patients’ COVID-19 Comments**

The number of comments mentioning key topics such as tests and cleanliness spiked quickly from the early days of the pandemic.

Patients reported positive and negative comments for COVID-19, with negative comments outpacing positive comments in most of the key categories.

**What this tells us:**

Analyzing patient comments and identifying themes provides organizations with a powerful tool for understanding and anticipating heightened patient needs and a strong opportunity to adjust tactics and communication plans to respond effectively.
A top theme that emerged from our analyses of patients’ COVID-19–related comments was patient appreciation for providers and caregivers. In particular, patients recognize the personal risk and other challenges caregivers face under the present circumstances.

**Awareness and Appreciation for Caregivers**

**Physicians**

Top Themes

- Courtesy and Respect (n = 507)
  - Kind
  - Helpful
  - Empathy/Compassion
  - Patience

- Reliability and Scheduling (n = 246)
  - Time Period/Duration
  - Prompt
  - Wait/Timing
  - Appointment/Reservation

- Doctor (n = 1,191)
  - Skill/Knowledge (n = 219)
  - Thorough
  - Professional
  - Knowledge
  - Risky
  - Competence

- Explanation (n = 101)
  - Question/Answer
  - Diagnosis
  - Informative
  - Prompt

**Sample Comments**

“The staff made arrangements all the way from specific parking, to meeting me outside for PPE, and promptly had me in a room.”

“Staff was polite, professional, kind, helpful, and took extra sanitary measures in light of COVID-19.”

“I was impressed by the doctor and the cleanliness in this date of pandemic coronavirus. He was very professional and explained why he couldn’t shake hands.”

**Staff**

Top Themes

- Courtesy and Respect (n = 859)
  - Kind
  - Helpful
  - Empathy/Compassion
  - Courteous

- Skill/Knowledge (n = 262)
  - Professional
  - Knowledge
  - Thorough
  - Risky

- Reliability and Scheduling (n = 207)
  - Efficiency
  - Prompt
  - Wait/Timing
  - Time Period/Duration
  - Appointment/Reservation

- Staff Type (n = 137)
  - Reception

**Recommendations for Building Strong Caregiver—Patient Relationships**

Share these insights with physicians and caregivers to remind them of patients’ gratitude for all they are doing during this crisis.

Educate and encourage physicians and caregivers to use the following Universal Relationship Skills to create a connection with each patient at the start of every encounter.

- Make eye contact and be aware of body language.
- Introduce yourself and your role.
- Acknowledge the current situation with a core safety message.
- Always prompt the patient to share concerns.
- Narrate any care that you provide.
Concerns About Testing Delays and Cleanliness

A large number of patients’ negative COVID-19–related comments mentioned delays in tests and treatments. Of note, concerns about delays were mitigated when caregivers communicated transparently with patients to set expectations. The apparent cleanliness of the care setting and safety practices were also top concerns, indicating patients’ heightened awareness of hygiene and safety practices, such as handwashing, the availability of personal protective equipment, and sanitizing efforts.

Tests and Treatments
(n=1,914)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Themes</th>
<th>Time Period/Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reliability and Scheduling (n = 639)</td>
<td>Available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test or Treatment Type (n = 574)</td>
<td>Wait/Timing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test Result Process (n = 410)</td>
<td>X-Ray</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample Comments

“The procedure was dramatically delayed to serve the needs of COVID-19 management. I have no quarrel with such a delay, but I was not told any reason … for several hours. Proper communication would have assuaged my anger.”

“The nurse/assistant should have offered to test for COVID-19 and have it sent away to a lab for results.”

“In these days of coronavirus, I was not happy there was no hand sanitizer available after using stylus on machine to take my signature.”

Cleanliness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environment and Personal (Cleanliness) (n = 308)</th>
<th>Waiting Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reliability and Scheduling (n = 178)</td>
<td>Personal Hygiene</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recommendations for Building Patient Trust in Practices and Processes

Caregivers and staff should consistently communicate with patients about the steps they are taking to ensure their safety.

Providers and health systems experiencing capacity challenges related to COVID-19 should set expectations about likely impacts on access and timing of treatment.

Caregivers and staff should practice **Universal Reliability Skills** for checking and coaching and for communication.

- Encourage and affirm safe behaviors such as handwashing and sanitizing efforts.
- Discourage and correct unsafe behaviors such as shaking hands.
- Narrate all care being provided.
Impact on Patients’ Rating of Experience

Patients with COVID-19 comments in their survey responses were more likely to rate many other areas of care lower than those who did not mention COVID-19. Although these analyses are based on surveys completed during the first wave of the pandemic, the observed rating differences are significant for all of the measures shown.

For both medical practice and ED patients, wide gaps are seen in items measuring patients’ perceptions of the quality of the instructions and information they received and whether providers listened to and respected them. Gaps are also evident in global items such at Rate the Provider/ED and Likelihood to Recommend.

The widest gap in top-box performance is in the Emergency Department domain rating providers’ willingness to let family and friends be present, likely reflecting the changing policies associated with COVID-19 precautions.

Communication and Transparency: Meeting Needs Today to Build Enduring Trust

Extended periods of uncertainty give rise to unanticipated needs and anxiety. The nature of the coronavirus pandemic has led patients and caregivers to look to health systems and their leaders for reassurance. Patients and families respect the commitment and risk that front-line caregivers have embraced and are relying on them in this time of crisis. Understanding and meeting their needs with communication and transparency is essential. This is a critical moment and important opportunity to build unbreakable bonds of trust with patients and families that will extend long past the pandemic.