

Engaging with authenticity:

Delivering highly
trusted patient content
for improved outcomes

Patients are hungry for information about their healthcare and do not necessarily turn to their doctors as their sole or even primary resource. Surveys indicate that over half (55%) of US adults turned to social media platforms for advice on their healthcare in 2025. Some sources indicate an increasing number of patients, as high as 45% of Gen Z adults, ignore or disregard the advice of their healthcare providers based on information obtained via social media. While reliance on social media platforms and digital resources for health information varies by country, the trend is clear – the content that resonates the most includes peer learnings and first-person experiences.

Patients' increasing reliance on social media platforms and digital resources means there is a need for highly trusted, audience-appropriate, analytically robust patient-facing content.

¹KFF. <https://www.kff.org/public-opinion/kff-health-information-and-trust-tracking-poll-health-information-and-advice-on-social-media/> (accessed March 2026).

²AXIOS. <https://www.axios.com/2025/04/24/trust-health-advice-gen-z-edelman> (accessed March 2026).

³Yu YS et al. Prev Med Rep 2025;57:103179.

“Authentically articulating the patient experience to other patients is more important than ever, and pharmaceutical companies need to recognize their role in that process.”

—Art Kerwin, Senior Vice President of Strategic Innovation and Growth, Patient Engagement at OPEN Health

Building trust means giving voice to real patient experiences to help other patients understand their disease and engage in their care. “Being able to bring the patient community in as long-term collaborators has technical, legal, and practical implications that can make the entire process of partnership complex,” says Jasmine Malone, Vice President of Patient Content and Storytelling at OPEN Health. “But with the right support, the returns of true collaboration across the entire pipeline can be great: from using peer support to improve screening rates and disease awareness, to using behavior science to tailor patient support programs and improve treatment adherence.”



Key takeaways

- Highly trusted, co-created content is the only patient engagement approach that works consistently for patients.
- The communication foundations of a successful launch are built years in advance; to deliver, you need a partner that is skilled in the early engagement of patients, communicating with empathy and telling their authentic stories in a way that fills knowledge gaps for other patients.
- Engaging patients and advocacy organizations throughout the drug development life cycle lays the groundwork for success: gathering insights, broadening disease awareness and improving screening.
- Strategic patient engagement delivers strong commercial value: patient research, education, support and patient-to-patient communications all contribute to therapy success.

Building highly trusted content means giving patients an opportunity to share their voice

No one knows more about a patient's real experience than another patient with that same disease receiving treatment in an equivalent setting. But there are barriers to patients finding and communicating with one another, both in terms of available platforms and in terms of bringing that experience to life in a relatable way for other patients.

Pharmaceutical companies have a role to play in helping find those patients and supporting them to communicate their experiences in an accurate and balanced way. That means empathizing with patients and understanding the different types of challenges within their journey. It also means capturing these stories authentically across a representative cross-section of the patient community and ensuring data capture reflects the varied spectrum of safety and efficacy outcomes surrounding a therapy aligned to the product labeling.

Katelyn Findley, Associate Director of Patient Strategy & Insights at OPEN Health, encourages clients to consider the full patient community and reflect the voices of diverse demographics and socioeconomic realities.

“We’re not just creating website copy: we’re partnering with patients to share their real stories. Peer-to-peer conversations are a powerful way people learn about their health, and when our clients communicate about disease states and treatments through the voices of patients and families who live with these conditions, it drives genuine understanding and action.”

–Katelyn Findley
Associate Director of Patient Strategy & Insights at OPEN Health

Structured, qualitative, or mixed-methods approaches that are specifically designed and calibrated to capture the patient experience can deliver on this area of unmet need. The resultant data can do more than support patient story selection; it can potentially drive publication in peer-reviewed journals to help healthcare providers understand the patient's journey better.

Other methods may be more appropriate, depending on the patient population. "There are multiple methods for finding a representative way of reflecting patient experience," says Kerwin. "The important thing is illustrating clinical trial data in a way that is relatable, while still appropriately informing patient or shared decision-making through that authentic patient voice."

Engaging with empathy and ensuring that patients feel heard while also fostering an environment of knowledge sharing can help build trust between pharmaceutical companies and the therapy area community, which can be difficult to achieve.

"The biggest challenge, but also the biggest opportunity, is the varying level of trust between a pharmaceutical company and the individual person, who happens to be a patient. Pharmaceutical clients come to us to identify and deliver solutions based on evidence. But patients and their families are people, so understanding the behavioral attributes of their lived experiences and designing potential solutions around those behaviors is key to their effectiveness and, ultimately, key to whether any patient engagement activity will add true, measurable value."

–Jasmine Malone
Vice President of Patient Content and Storytelling at OPEN Health

Early, empathetic engagement drives outcomes

Many pharmaceutical companies incorporate patient voices into portions of their clinical development plans and clinical trial protocols, but few harness patient voices on diseases and treatments in their medical and commercial plans in the years preceding launch.

Patient-to-patient communications on disease education and treatment experience can help meaningfully expand the number of patients undergoing screening and engaging in conversations about their health with their physicians, sometimes well before symptoms progress. However, developing such communications requires a deep understanding of the level of health literacy in the relevant patient community and potential structural barriers impacting patient care.

All patient engagement materials should be developed with an **“expert level of empathy applied to the language, tone of voice, and content,”** Malone says.

Content should be informed by the science and appropriate medical information and also inspire patients to want to learn more and engage in the patient support offered. Above all, patient-facing content must appropriately acknowledge the patients' varied emotions, behaviors and challenges across therapy areas and stages of disease. All patient materials must reflect appropriate empathy for each disease stage, from initial diagnosis to management of chronic disease. This adds an essential layer of understanding and humanity that can often be hard to achieve in clinical settings but is essential to effective patient support and engagement.

“We’re nurses and social workers, and trained in talking to people and being empathetic,” explains Kristine Lassiter, Associate Director of Patient Relationship Management at OPEN Health. “Successful patient engagement really comes down to getting to know each person and tailoring the way that we work to meet their individual needs.”

Empowering patients through unique content and appropriate levels of health literacy

To drive trust, empathetic content needs to be powered by data, and the data needs to be communicated in a way patients can understand and act on. Health literacy is critical for healthcare decision-making and must be a key consideration when developing content with the aim of facilitating behavior change. Over 60% of Americans have been identified as having low levels of health literacy.³

“Your level of health literacy can be critical to your survival,” says Malone.

Providing the right information to the right patient at the right time is the key to patient engagement and knowledge equity, encouraging medication adherence and safety. A truly patient-centric approach to communication requires developing content and storytelling solutions that are informed by an understanding of the principles of health literacy and the requirements of the specific patient population. Patient advocacy groups depend on accessible communication materials to advocate for, educate, and empower patients, while also lobbying government for policy change.

“From a content perspective, we want to understand not only the types of materials that patients will engage with and when they will engage with them, but also what level of medical education is required in order for a patient or caregiver to meaningfully be able to participate in decisions around their health,” Malone says. “Often when patients

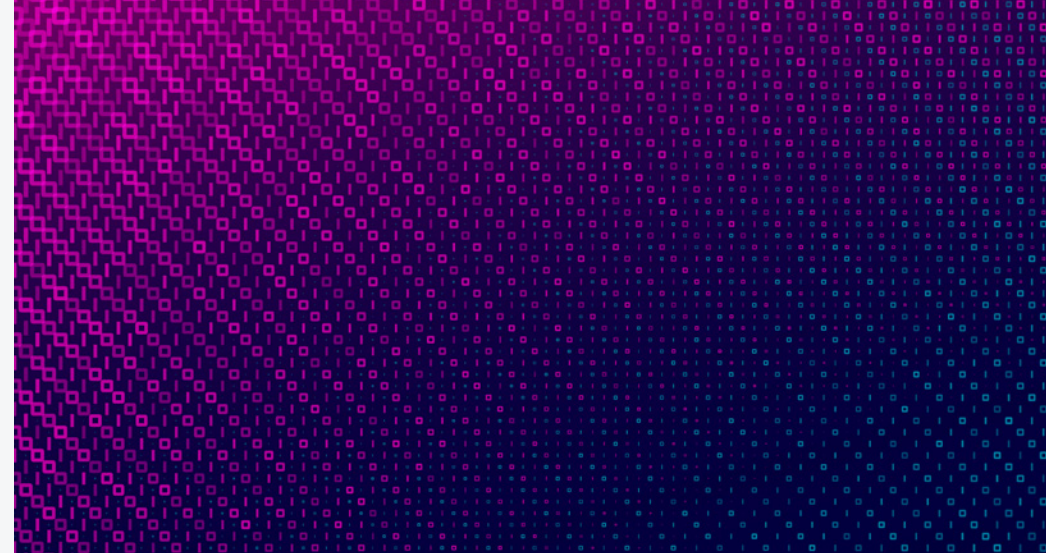
engage in healthcare-related decision-making, it's a lack of comprehension rather than a lack of understanding the science that is the main barrier to positive action; specifically, a lack of health literacy."

Patients need to understand how the science described to them by their doctor translates to their disease, as well as the quality of life and practical implications of their illness. Pharmaceutical companies must consider patients' learning preferences and willingness to interact with different materials to design content that will better support their treatment journey.

At OPEN Health, "our execution of good health literacy principles is second to none; we understand that a lot of the time, the visual experience and emotional interaction with patient materials can be almost as important as whether or not you can understand the words," Malone says.

"Being sick is challenging enough. You should not have to struggle navigating the materials that are supposed to help you in this time of need. Patients are much more likely to engage with and act on materials that are accessible, visually appealing, and 'speak' to them in their current emotional state."

—Jasmine Malone
Vice President of Patient Content and Storytelling at OPEN Health



Working with the community on shared decision-making tools and fostering important conversations between healthcare providers and patients can help pharmaceutical companies cut through the noise and create impactful content.

"Our Patient Engagement practice is unique in the healthcare communication landscape due to having over 20 years of dedicated experience in effective peer-to-peer storytelling," says Malone. "During this time, we have seen the concepts of patient centricity, cross-collaboration, health literacy, and personalized patient experiences grow from fledgling initiatives and blue-sky thinking to foundational principles across all our clients. We are proud to have contributed to this changing landscape and look forward to supporting our clients to develop materials that improve and support patients' lived experiences with empathy and accuracy in an age where there is increasing focus on automation and generic, AI-generated content."

Concluding thoughts

Patient perspectives matter to health authorities, to providers and, most importantly, to other patients. OPEN Health's reputation among patients and the patient community in co-developing highly trusted patient engagement is unmatched.

Reach out to us at artkerwin@openhealthgroup.com to learn more.