



HOW HEALTHCARE PRACTICES ARE

# MANAGING A DRASTIC INCREASE IN CALL VOLUME WITH FEWER RESOURCES

AS A RESULT OF COVID-19

## CALL VOLUME INCREASE

## CALL VOLUME FEB - JUN '20

69%   
PERCENT INCREASE



FEB 2020



JUN 2020

## TOTAL CALL VOLUME

507,690

FEB 2020

857,985

JUN 2020

## AVERAGE CALL VOLUME / OFFICE

350

FEB 2020

592

JUN 2020

Between February and June of 2020, healthcare practices in North America experienced a dramatic shift in the way they conducted patient care due to the events of COVID-19. February was the last month of “normalcy” before extensive restrictions were placed on patient visits. Conversely, June was predominately the first month in which most healthcare practices resumed a new normal in their operations, hours, and procedures. The stark difference in phone trends between these two months, however, is clear – **call volume increased by 69% from February to June of 2020.** This dramatic spike in patient calls has forced many practices to adjust to managing an overwhelming call volume with fewer resources.

## DIVING INTO PHONE TRENDS

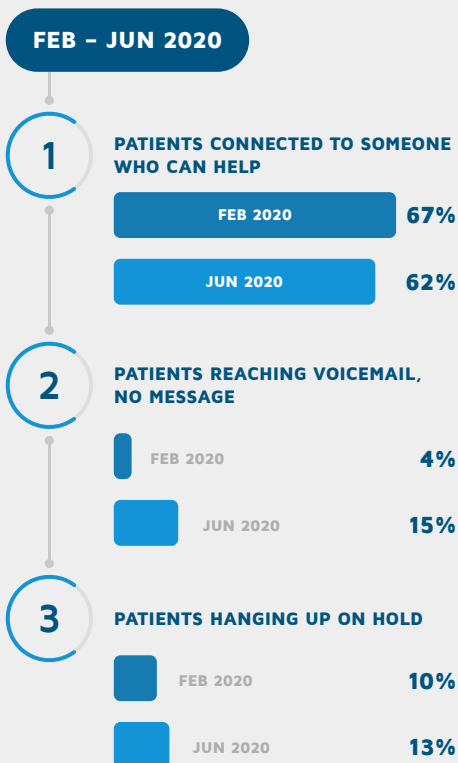
According to Call Box's in-depth review of 1,450 healthcare practices across North America, offices received a total of 507,690 patient calls in February 2020. In June, this total number of calls jumped to 857,985. **On an individual office level, that amounts to an increase from 350 calls in February to 592 calls in June – a 69% spike in call volume between the two months.** This surge in patient calls is due most notably to the additional coordination now needed to deliver patient care such as communicating new safety measures, rescheduling appointments, coordinating patient arrivals and virtual/parking lot waiting rooms, and more.

Unfortunately, many healthcare practices are currently operating with reduced staff, reduced budgets, and fewer overall resources. This has created a challenge in managing the high demand of patient callers. Not only has this been an overwhelming experience for staff, but it is also a frustrating experience for patients who are unable to connect with staff members and are increasingly placed on hold or reach a voicemail.

Specifically, the percent of patients hanging up the phone while on hold increased by an average of 3% from February to June of 2020, and those reaching voicemail without leaving a message increased by 11%. Furthermore, the overall percent of patients connected to someone who can help them at a practice dropped by 5% from February to June of 2020.

**With that said, healthcare practices are finding ways to manage this 69% increase in call volume without experiencing similarly substantial spikes in callers not connecting to their desired party** – offices are minimizing any sharp declines in their ability to connect patient callers. *How is this being accomplished?*

#### AVERAGE CONNECTION PERFORMANCE



# 6 RECOMMENDATIONS

## TO EFFECTIVELY MANAGE HIGH CALL VOLUME

01

### STAFF APPROPRIATELY BASED ON PRACTICE TRENDS

In both February and June of 2020, **Mondays were the busiest day of the week for patient calls, followed by Tuesdays.** Furthermore, across all time zones, **the 10 AM hour was the busiest hour for calls, followed closely by 11 AM.** However, every practice will experience ebbs and flows in its call volume. Perhaps you have an e-newsletter that goes out every Tuesday evening with limited-time promotions and you receive a surge of calls first thing Wednesday morning. Therefore, it's important to consider your own practice's phone trends when staffing your front desk. Taking a look at both when you receive the most calls and when patients are struggling to get in touch with your team will allow you to staff your practice more appropriately to handle your current call volume.

02

### CONSIDER REMOTE STAFF AND/OR CALL CENTERS

While staggering your staff schedules can alleviate some of the pressure on your phone lines, it might still be necessary to turn to remote staff and/or call centers to ensure your patients are always being helped when calling in. **Top healthcare practices often utilize remote workforces to act as extensions of their own teams during times of high call volume or off-hours.** While best practices indicate this shouldn't be a first line of defense, remote teams can be very helpful to assist with overflow calls, existing patient scheduling, or after-hours assistance.



## 03

## LEVERAGE TEXTING

One tool many healthcare practices are currently leveraging to help alleviate high call volume is text messaging. Texting can be a very effective form of communication when leveraged properly. From sending reminder texts to coordinating virtual or parking lot waiting rooms, **texting can help reduce call volume and keep phone lines open for patients who are scheduling new appointments.** With incredibly high open rates and fast response times, texting is a powerful solution for patient engagement. Many providers, including Call Box, offer text messaging platforms that integrate with the tools you're already using.

## 04

## LEVERAGE BRIDGES OR PHONE MENUS

Many healthcare practices use bridges (also called phone menus or phone trees) to help direct callers to the appropriate individual before even reaching a staff member. These automated messages sound something like: *"Thank you for calling ABC Health. New patients, please press 1. Existing patients, please press 2. For billing inquiries, please press 3."* These bridges are most effective when a practice has different areas of the office handling different types of patient calls. **In doing so, the front desk can focus on scheduling patients, for example, instead of acting as a receptionist to transfer billing inquiries to an off-site location.** Instead, the phone menu would automatically transfer billing inquiries and the front desk would no longer be bogged down by callers they can't assist. Furthermore, this creates a more seamless experience for patients who do not have to be transferred and explain their inquiries multiple times.



## 05

**LEVERAGE OUTBOUND CALLING**

Another method of communication many successful practices leverage to ensure every patient is receiving the help he or she needs is outbound calling. **In fact, the number of outbound calls made to patients increased by 15% from February to June of 2020.** Top healthcare practices leverage outbound calls for a variety of reasons including calling back missed patient opportunities, following up on outstanding treatment plans, reminding patients of upcoming visits, and more. When calling back a patient who was unable to connect with your team on his or her original call to your practice, it's important to try to reach out within 24 hours to ensure the patient is helped in a timely manner and increase your odds at recapturing that opportunity.

## 06

**DEVELOP A FEEDBACK LOOP BASED ON CALL DATA**

**Top healthcare practices have developed a regular habit of tracking their phone trends and adjusting their operations as needed to stay stable or improve.** It's important to task your managerial staff with checking your call data at least weekly and setting ongoing goals to get ahead of any downward trends. When metrics drop, such as a practice's ability to connect patient calls to someone who can help, it's important to dive in to understand where the breakdown is occurring to make adjustments to phone processes, phone skills, staff schedules, technology, etc. Call Box makes keeping tabs on phone trends easy with Automated Reports. Any of Call Box's reports can be sent directly to designated individuals' emails on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis to develop an ongoing feedback loop and accountability for continuous improvement.

**RECOMMENDATIONS OVERVIEW**

Staff your team appropriately to manage high call volume based on daily and weekly phone trends.



Consider external workforces including remote staff or call centers to more effectively manage calls during times of high call volume or after-hours.



Leverage texting to alleviate high call volume and coordinate patient care.



Leverage outbound calling to call back missed patient opportunities, follow up on outstanding treatment plans, remind patients of upcoming visits, and more.



Leverage phone menus to help direct callers to the appropriate party before reaching a staff member.



Develop a habit of consistently tracking phone trends and adjusting phone processes as needed to stay ahead of any downward trends.



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Although healthcare practices are now, on average, handling 69% more calls than just a few months ago, top practices are finding ways to effectively manage high call volume and ensure patients are still receiving the help they need. From effectively staffing your front desk to leveraging tools like texting and outbound calling, successful offices are deploying a variety of resources to stay ahead of the competition.

#### LEARN MORE

To learn more about Call Box and our tools to better manage your patient calls and optimize call outcomes, visit [callbox.com](https://callbox.com) or call 833-745-0789.