

Technology has provided a wide range of valuable options for improving the patient experience. High-tech solutions such as [augmented and virtual reality technologies](#), patient engagement portals and online scheduling tools, mobile apps, and wearable devices are revolutionizing the ways in which patients are cared for and how they manage their own health.

However, as the patient experience extends beyond traditional care settings to incorporate care across a wide clinical spectrum, healthcare administrators must find the right balance between high-tech and high touch. Most importantly, they need to guarantee that staff have the training, tools—and commitment to the organization’s mission, vision and values—to ensure positive patient experiences and reiterate the idea that technology will never entirely replace the value of human interaction, particularly in healthcare environments.

Medicine is a “contact sport,” says vascular surgeon Paula Muto, MD, founder and CEO of [UBERDOC](#), a patient-to-specialist (p2s) direct access web app, and requires a balance between personal, in-person, care when it’s warranted and technological alternatives when they may be more efficient, cost-effective and medically appropriate — “combining convenience with physical access.” As she says: “A plane can land itself except when you need a pilot to react to changes in conditions.”

The same concept applies in healthcare. Sometimes technology can readily, and independently, serve a patient’s needs. Sometimes a human being must be involved. Human beings must also be involved in determining when a “pilot” needs to be included.

Patient preference, of course, also plays an important role here. Patients are also consumers and are well aware of the conveniences that technology has to offer. Just online, they can bank, purchase a wide range of goods and services, conduct research—often related to healthcare and wellness issues—and, increasingly, they can even receive health care.

Technology, of course, must enhance, not detract from, the patient experience.

Diana Douglas, vice president of risk management and patient safety with the [Cooperative of American Physicians, Inc. \(CAP\)](#) recommends that clinicians adopt the following practices to promote a positive, high-tech high touch experience for patients:

- Review medical records beforehand to drive more focus on the patient, and less time looking at the screen, during appointments.
- Prepare patients in advance by letting them know the doctor will be using a computer to record notes during the appointment.

- Make eye contact. Looking a patient in the eye establishes trust, respect and allows clinicians to read body language and important cues.
- When working on the computer, sit down with the patient, maintain eye level, and let them see what's being done onscreen.
- If a patient feels uncomfortable with the computer or is talking about a serious condition, write down the information with pen and paper and enter notes into the computer after the visit has ended.
- Use the screen as a tool to educate patients, show graphs of their progress, or show how-to videos to help patients better understand what you are explaining.

Ultimately, the balance and interplay between technology and direct patient care is not an either/or. It's not high-tech *or* high touch, but high-tech *and* high touch.

Rebecca Metter, CEO of healthcare technology company [Wambi](#), sums it up well: "In healthcare, technology is a vehicle used to enhance the human component of empathy. Organizations must embrace technology that is subtle enough to emphasize this human connection, but powerful enough to improve patient interactions and, ultimately, increase quality of care."