

Insights from the Front Lines



Current Limitations and Actionable Steps to Enhance Patient Experience

Executive Summary

This whitepaper examines the challenges and opportunities in patient experience management within South African private hospitals. Currently, most hospitals rely on paper-based feedback forms that take considerable time to process and respond to patient concerns. Feedback forms that rarely convert to insights that drive data-driven improvement efforts. Even hospitals using electronic systems face issues such as poor integration with existing processes and a lack of access to data across all levels of management. This hinders de-escalation efforts and lengthens improvement cycles. Through interviews and surveys with hospital managers, the whitepaper identifies key issues; including incomplete feedback, lack of formal complaint management systems, and limited resources, particularly in smaller facilities.

To address these challenges, the whitepaper recommends adopting technology-driven solutions, such as real-time feedback systems with de-escalation processes, customizable surveys, and better reporting to make data-based improvements. These changes can significantly enhance patient satisfaction, improve hospital performance, and positively impact financial outcomes. This whitepaper gives hospital leaders a roadmap for modernizing their patient experience management practices, offering actionable insights to drive measurable improvements.

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Objectives

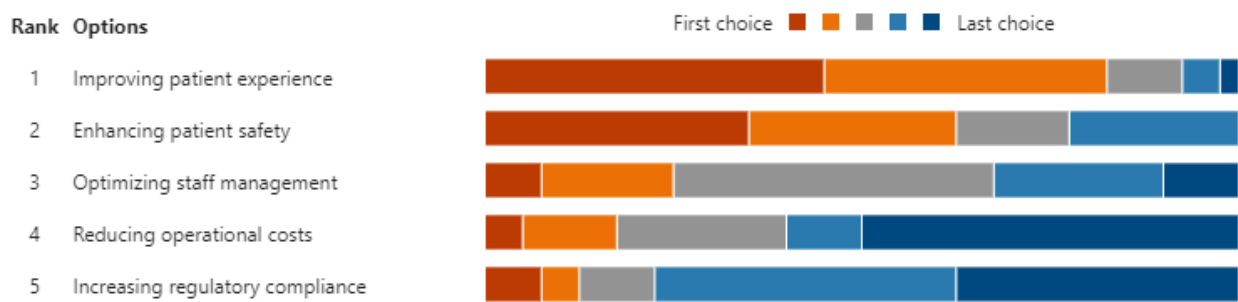
As a technology company, Converge Solutions delivers specialised software and solutions to the healthcare industry. Our mission is to be the custodians of positive change across the world. To do everything we can to reimagine a better world and build solutions that solve the most pressing challenges.

With that in mind, we set out to talk to the people who face these challenges every day. To get a first-hand perspective of the challenges faced by private hospitals, how they handle them, and what could be done to help solve them.

Our objectives were to:

- 1. **Identify Leadership Priorities:** Determine the top priorities of hospital managers over the next 12 months in critical areas.
- 2. **Evaluate Current Practices:** Understand what hospitals are currently doing in each focus area.
- 3. **Identify Key Challenges:** Pinpoint the major challenges hospital managers face in these areas.
- 4. **Determine Valuable Platform Features:** Identify methods that would help hospital leaders improve their Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in priority areas.

We surveyed 40 different managers across hospitals in South Africa, asking them what their top priorities were for their organization over the next 12 months. These were the results:



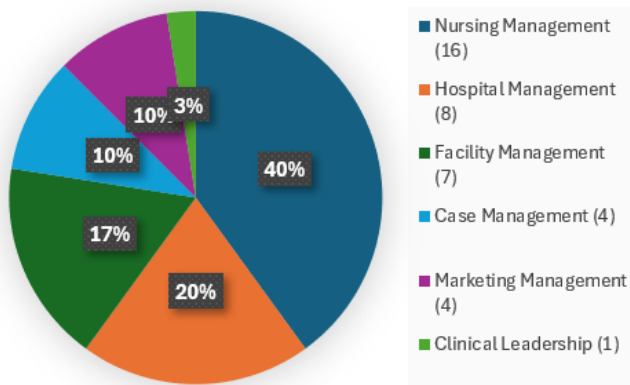
Due to the above-mentioned priority list, we decided to focus our attention on Patient Experience Management. KPIs for this area include patient satisfaction scores, referral rates and complaint intervention speeds. With whitepapers on Incident Management and Workforce Management to follow.

Methodology

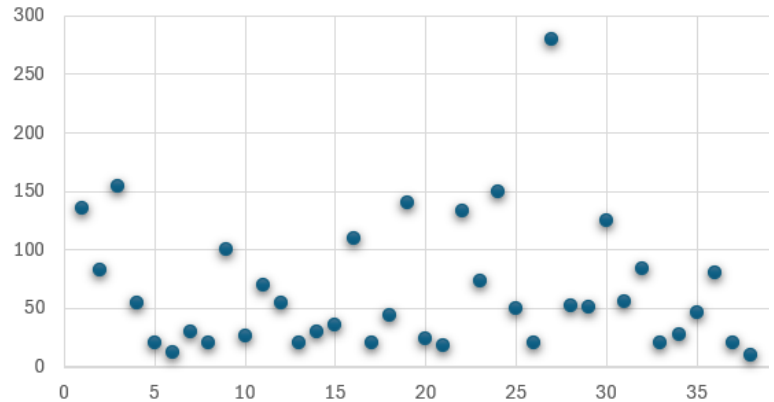
We compiled a list of all the private hospitals in South Africa from the NHN and DHASA; focusing on Acute, Sub-acute and Day Hospitals. After this, we looked for suitable participants at each of the hospitals at a managerial or executive level using LinkedIn or direct contact with the hospital.

Subjects who agreed to contribute were asked to complete a survey and an interview.

Respondent Job Titles



Respondent Hospital Size (beds)



The survey questions allowed us to get a basic understanding of the respondent's current practices, challenges and priorities.

These areas were then expanded on during the interviews to get a more in-depth account of their experience.

Patient Experience Management

Current Practices:

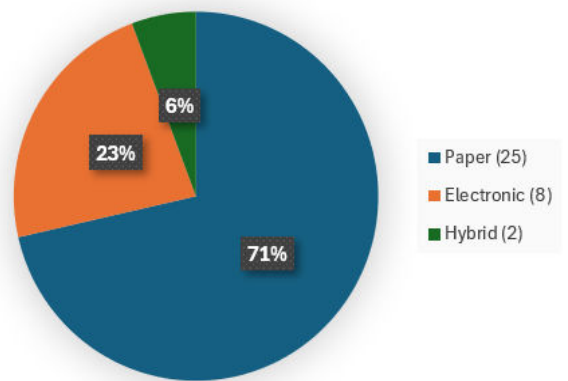
This section outlines the current methods employed by hospitals to gather feedback from patients.

Most hospitals use some form of paper-based survey system (71%). These forms are mostly given to patients on discharge, and on rarer occasions, respondents reported asking patients to complete a survey while they were still admitted to the hospital. The feedback received during the patient's stay, such as intentional rounding, was usually not formally recorded.

23% of respondents reported using an electronic system to gather feedback. Most of the systems allowed for automated surveys, although the feedback usually went to a head office before being distributed to hospital managers. This resulted in a delayed response to patient complaints, with hospital staff usually only being notified after the patient had been discharged.

Only 6% of respondents reported that they were using a hybrid system of paper and electronic systems. In this case, paper forms were usually completed by patients before being manually typed into an online survey platform by staff. The online surveys could then be used by management to draw reports before being submitted to different levels of management in the organisation.

Current Feedback System



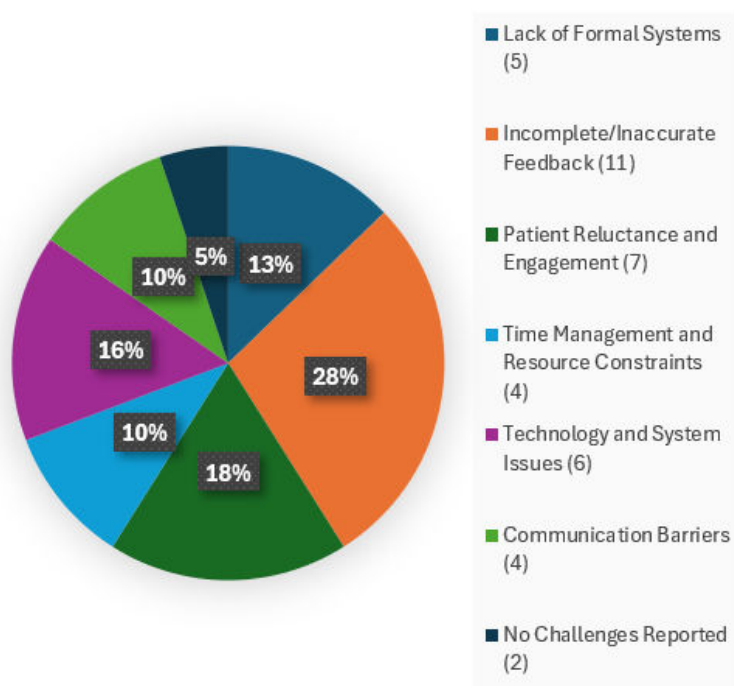
Challenges:

This section addresses the most common challenges that respondents reported in the area of Patient Experience Management.

Incomplete or Inaccurate Feedback: There were multiple mentions of challenges related to patients not completing feedback forms, providing inaccurate feedback, or the feedback being generic. This trend points to a need for more engaging and accessible methods for collecting patient feedback. Possibly through better-designed surveys to tell the difference between patients' survey submissions and that of their families or flexibility in when surveys can be answered.

Lack of Formal Systems: Many respondents indicate that their hospitals either lack a formal system for managing patient feedback or are using inefficient manual processes. This suggests a widespread need for more structured and automated feedback systems to ensure timely and effective management of patient concerns.

Challenges Reported



Reluctance to Complain: Several respondents noted that patients are often reluctant to provide negative feedback, due to a fear of being mistreated for the duration of their stay. This reluctance can hinder the hospital's ability to identify and address issues promptly. Some solutions would be to provide anonymous feedback opportunities or specifically communicate to patients the intent of the surveys, to address their fears of mistreatment due to complaints.

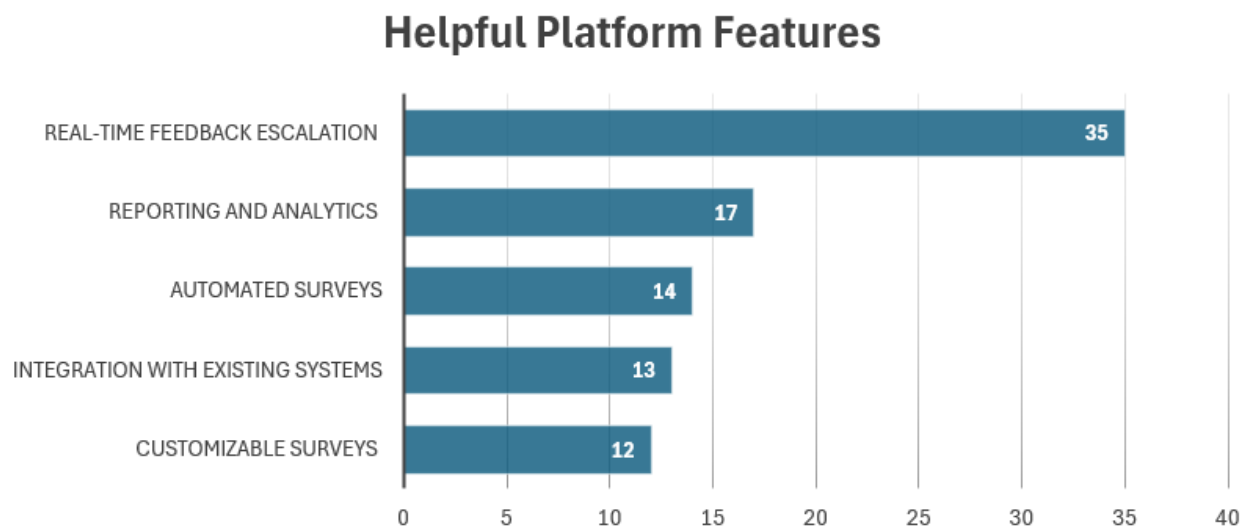
Limited Time and Resources: Especially in smaller facilities, limited time and resources are a common challenge, making it difficult to follow up with patients after discharge or to manage feedback systematically. This trend highlights the need for efficient feedback mechanisms that can be managed with minimal resources.

Issues with Electronic Systems: While some hospitals have adopted electronic feedback systems, these systems are not without challenges, such as being time-consuming or difficult to manage. This trend suggests that while technology can improve feedback processes, proper implementation and support are also required to be effective.

Lack of Clear Communication: Issues with unclear or long questionnaires, or patients not understanding the questions due to age or cognitive impairments, suggest that communication barriers are a significant challenge. Simplifying communication and ensuring that feedback tools are accessible to all patients could improve the quality of feedback.

Valuable Platform Features and Possible Improvements:

This section explores the features respondents indicated would be most helpful in a platform and the improvements that can be made to address the above-mentioned challenges.



Real-Time Feedback Escalation: 35 respondents mentioned that they would like to receive real-time notifications in the event of a patient complaint. This would allow them to de-escalate conflicts before the patient complains on social media or leaves negative online reviews of the hospital. This is a major area of improvement that will have a direct correlation with patient referral rates, hospital reputation and by extension, occupancy levels and revenue.

Reporting and Analytics: Few hospitals are currently making full use of their patient feedback forms. Form submissions are mostly handled on a case-by-case basis without a holistic view of patient sentiment. Hospitals that can draw reports and analyse patient feedback are quicker to spot trends and make improvements in areas that consistently receive negative feedback. Although some hospitals use electronic systems to capture and report on feedback, such reports are usually only available to the head office, leaving hospital managers without the ability to drive local change.

Automated Surveys: Time and resource constraints are a growing concern. The ability to automate patient surveys would free up a significant amount of time for staff. Automation can also include a multitude of ways to gather patient feedback. For example: patients can be sent electronic surveys via sms or email once they are marked as discharged on the Hospital Information System (HIS). Patients can also be given a tablet/smartphone to fill out surveys in person either on discharge or daily rounds. The ability to provide flexible feedback collection methods should improve patient reluctance/engagement as they have more options to provide feedback at a time that is more suitable to them.

Integration with Existing Systems: Respondents who mentioned that they would be interested in adopting an electronic platform mentioned the importance of its integration with their existing systems.

For example, survey platforms would need to pull patient information from their HIS to avoid participants having to re-enter their details every time they provided feedback.

Customizable Surveys: The most common challenge respondents mentioned was incomplete/inaccurate patient feedback. Although providing flexible methods of collecting feedback, another element is required to improve the quality of reported information. The main reasons for bad quality feedback were: patients misunderstanding questions, family members answering on behalf of patients and patients opting out of surveys. A possible solution would be to better design surveys to identify if it is a patient or their family answering surveys. Simplifying or changing questions to be easier to understand. Not forcing patients to answer questions they don't want to as most patients would simply not respond at all instead of being forced to answer a specific question. All of these problems can be addressed if staff was able to quickly and easily customize surveys to better reflect the needs and capabilities of the patients. Presently, paper forms are used, which are not customizable; or survey questions are determined by head office and not by hospital managers.

Summary

Private hospitals in South Africa predominantly use inflexible paper systems to gather feedback on the experience of their patients. Although this provides a base method of gauging patient satisfaction, it is a contributing factor to a number of the common challenges that hospitals face concerning patient experience management. Most of the challenges could be addressed with an electronic system that: notifies staff in real-time of patient complaints, provides flexibility to patients in survey collection methods and times, automated and customizable patient surveys, while providing real-time analysis/reports on patient feedback.

Recommendations

Patient satisfaction has a direct correlation to hospital revenue through referrals and occupancy rates. As such it is extremely important for hospitals to manage patient feedback effectively. Start with an **internal assessment** of the hospital's current feedback procedures; note the amount of time spent on collecting patient feedback, patient response rates, staff response times and improvement cycles based on feedback data. **Identify areas that require improvement** and metrics that can be tracked to measure performance in these areas. Note the cost to the hospital's reputation and revenue if these areas are left as they are. **Explore possible solutions**; does the hospital have the in-house expertise to build its own system, or is there a cost-effective solution available that covers the improvement areas? **Pilot a suitable platform** and track metrics to see if a measurable improvement has been achieved. If not, adjust the platform and try again, or adopt the system if the desired improvements have been reached.

Thank You's

A special thank you to all the organisations who shared insights and contributed to this whitepaper.

