



Interoperability:

The big opportunity for HME/
supply providers and home
infusion pharmacies

[New research shows how to close the gap](#)

Interoperability: there is often confusion on what true interoperability means; however, it's the ability of computer systems to seamlessly exchange patient demographic and clinical information. In other words, relevant data will follow the patient and provide proper documentation for complete reimbursement. We've been talking about it since the concept came onto the healthcare scene in 2009 with the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act, offering monetary incentives to acute and ambulatory providers who moved from paper to digital health management.

And it's working, as evidenced by the fact that 66% of those who already have advanced interoperability capabilities are continuing to invest in it across their core billing and business systems, according to a recent study conducted by In90group Research and commissioned by Brightree.



But the new research — the industry's first Interoperability and Engagement Market Survey — also uncovered a big opportunity for HME providers and pharmacies today with a drastic gap between what they're doing and what referral sources want. According to the study, **99%** of referral sources confirm that they would likely send more referrals to providers who are more capable of receiving orders electronically, yet only **20%** of HME providers and pharmacies say that electronic data exchange is their primary way of receiving patient data.

Read the full report to learn how HME providers and pharmacies can close the gap.

Executive Summary

Interoperability, or the sharing of data across disparate systems, has been one of the most talked-about topics in healthcare for nearly a decade. Today, nearly all acute and ambulatory providers have adopted electronic health record (EHR) systems, and the vast majority of patient demographic and clinical data is now digital and ready to be shared electronically.

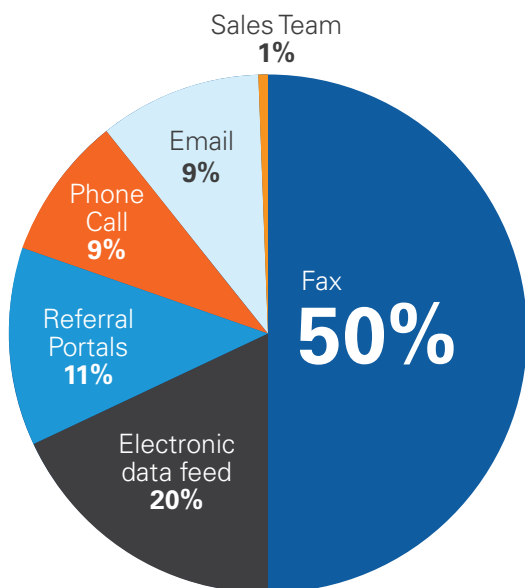
Interoperability is the ability of different information systems, devices, or applications to connect, in a coordinated manner, within and across organizational boundaries to access, exchange, and cooperatively use data amongst stakeholders, with the goal of optimizing the health of individuals and populations.

HIMSS, 2019

So why are so many HME providers and pharmacies far behind their counterparts, reporting that **80%** of their referrals come through outdated mechanisms, such as fax, email and phone calls versus electronically? This process requires an incredible amount of valuable time and resources because

electronic data must be converted into paper-based forms for faxing or emailing and then rekeying that data into another EHR or pharmacy management system.

How does your organization receive most of its referrals?

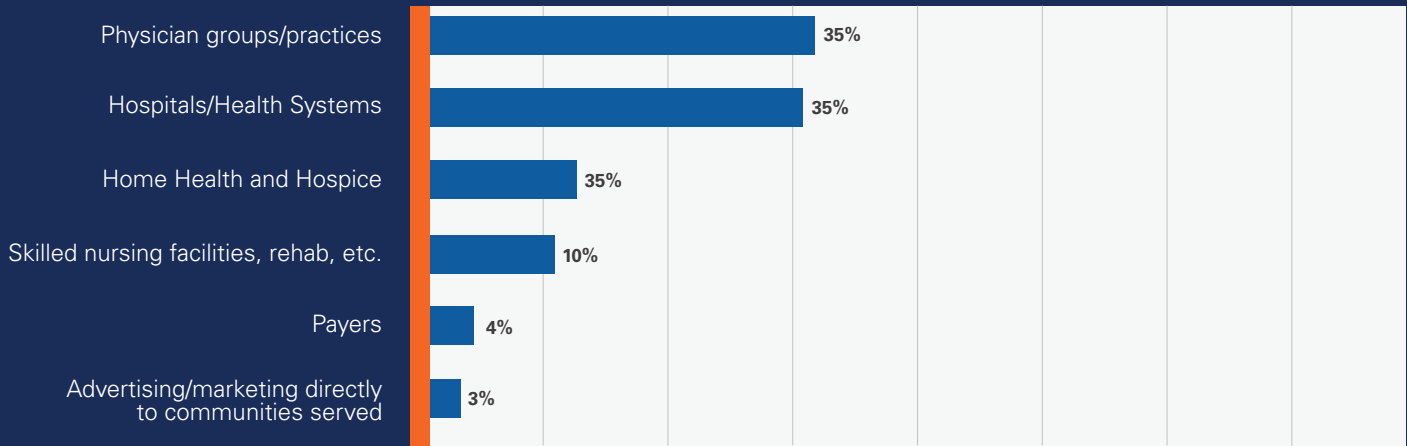


But perhaps a more important question to ask is: what do the referral sources who are already equipped to send electronic patient referrals to HME providers and pharmacies think about these outdated processes? What importance do these physicians and hospitals place on their post-acute care counterparts ability to do things like send/receive patient data electronically?

To help HME providers, HME pharmacies, home infusion pharmacies, and specialty pharmacies answer these questions and better understand the value that highly interoperable systems can bring, Brightree recently commissioned independent research firm In90group Research to conduct the industry's first Interoperability & Engagement Market Survey.

The research initiative collected insights from more than 100 HME and pharmacy business, operational and clinical leaders of all shapes and sizes. In addition, In90group Research surveyed 100 of the post-acute care industry's most popular referral sources, such as hospitals and physician groups.

Top Referral Sources for HME Providers and Pharmacies



The research findings reveal a significant mismatch between what referral sources expect and what HME providers and pharmacies are doing.

99%

of referral sources said they would likely send more referrals to providers who were more capable of receiving orders electronically.

96%

of referral sources said they would likely send more referrals to providers with strong patient engagement capabilities.

20%

of HME providers and pharmacies say they receive referrals via electronic data exchange most of the time.

The growing importance of interoperability

Since the dawn of the HITECH Act more than a decade ago, the healthcare industry has been obsessed with enabling interoperability.

More recently, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) doubled down on its efforts to accelerate interoperability adoption with the Interoperability and Patient Access Final Rule of 2021, which sought to make health information more available to patients and providers as patients move through the continuum of care.

There are several contributing factors to the rising importance of interoperability, but perhaps the biggest source of urgency comes from the rapidly growing adoption of value-based care payment arrangements. The research tells us that:

65%

of referral sources surveyed reported greater than 25% of their revenue is now tied to value-based care arrangements.

51%

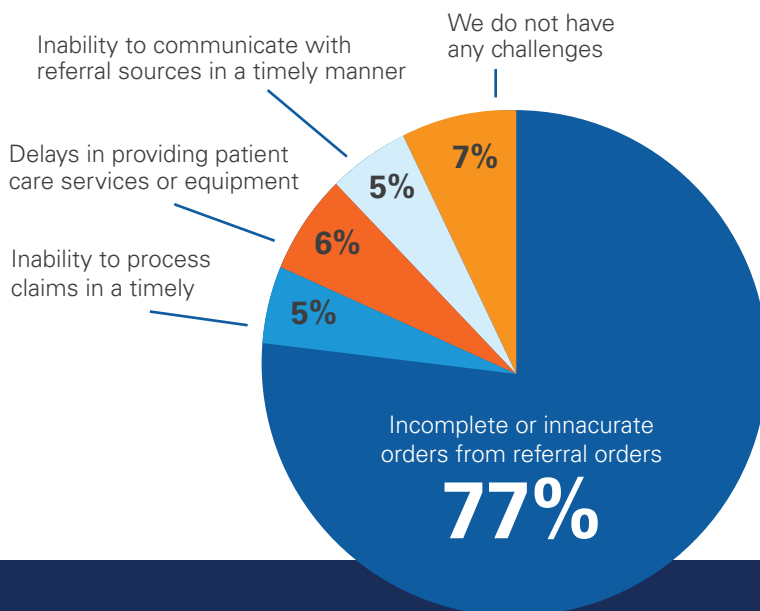
expect that percentage to grow over the next 12-18 months.



Being able to exchange data is a fundamental premise of successful value-based care models, because without accurate and timely electronic data, the risk of costly complications dramatically increases.

As a result, referral sources appear to have greater confidence in HME providers and pharmacies who have more advanced interoperability and patient engagement capabilities, putting more importance on adopting these more modern mechanisms.

Top challenges to getting important patient data and documentation from referral sources



In fact, **82%** of HME and pharmacy survey respondents reported experiencing an increase in the demand for electronic sending/receiving of patient data and documentation exchange from their referral sources in the past one-to-two years.

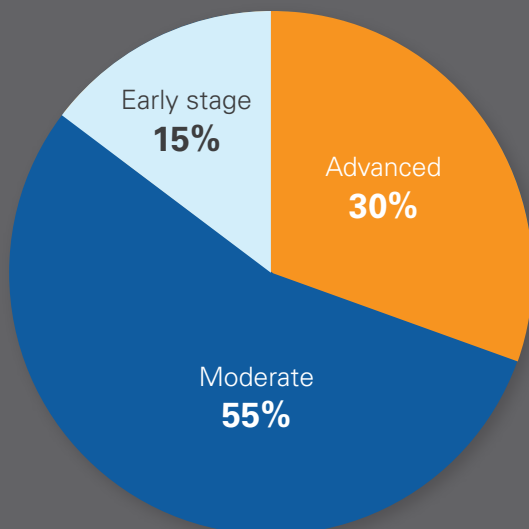
Another key driver behind the push to interoperability is the workforce shortage crisis that is plaguing all healthcare sectors in our post-pandemic society. The human capital shortage naturally drives the appetite for automation of tasks that can help create cleaner orders and greater operational efficiencies.



The business case for interoperability

Today, only **30%** of the market describes their interoperability efforts as “advanced.” The rest are moderate (**55%**) or early stage (**15%**). The good news is that many HME providers and pharmacies are starting to recognize and appreciate the value highly interoperable system can bring. When asked about their plans for the future, **92%** plan to invest in advancing their interoperability.

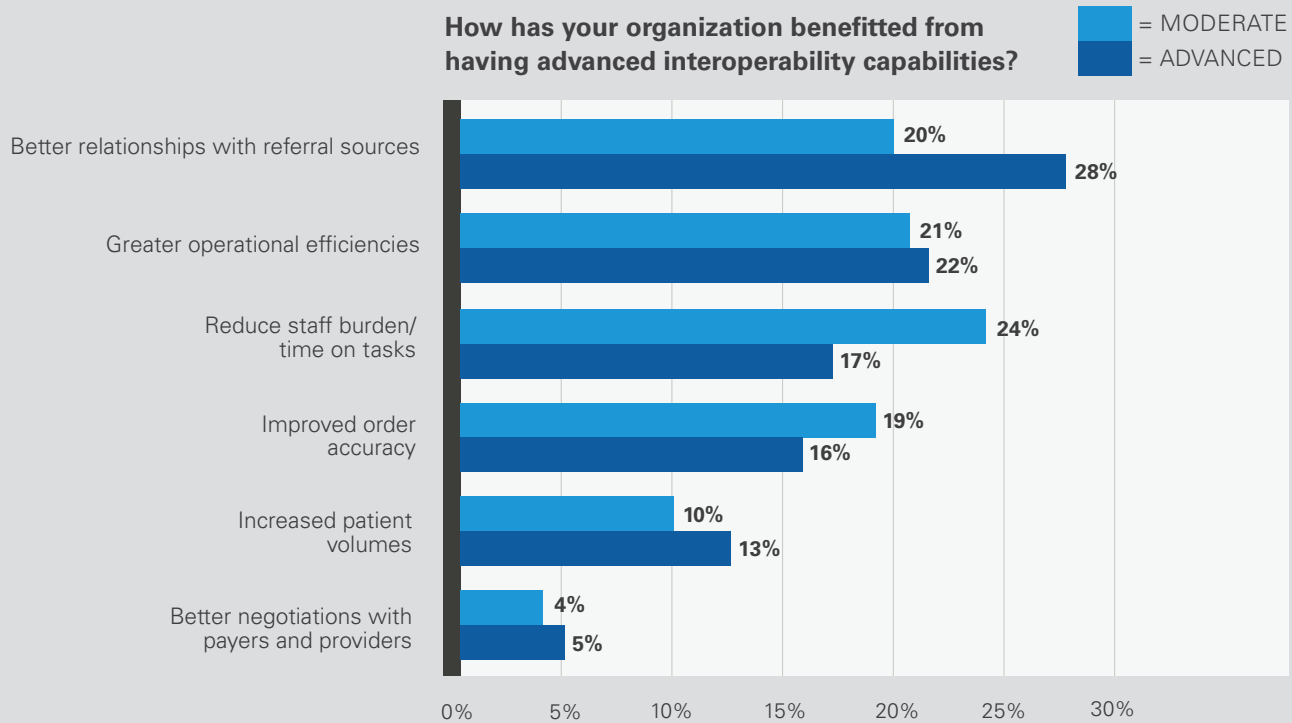
Self-reported current state of interoperability maturity



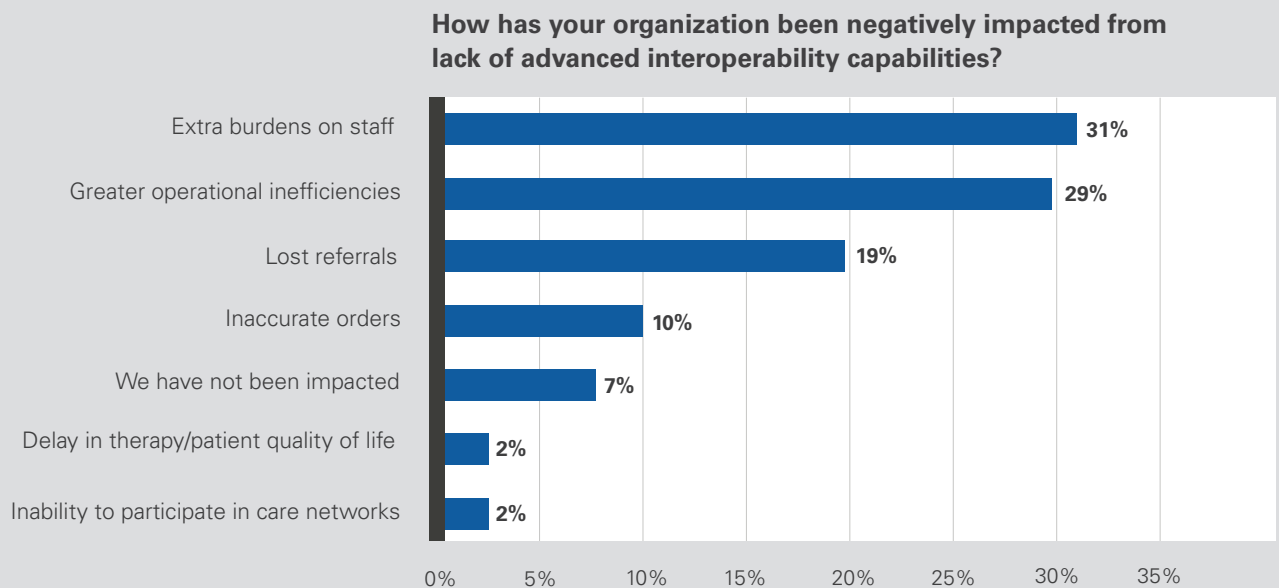
For those who consider themselves to be advanced or moderate, the benefits are clear: better relations with referral sources, greater operational efficiencies, reduced staff time on tasks, and improved order accuracy. For those who are in the early stages of investing in interoperability, they report negative impacts of extra staff burdens, operational inefficiencies, lost referrals, and inaccurate orders.



The impact of interoperability



Advanced and moderate maturity providers report benefits that drive growth and profitability. Among the 8% of providers who don't have plans to invest in more advanced interoperability, lack of financial means was the most commonly cited reason. Ironically, the price of not advancing interoperability will ultimately cost these providers more: more manual resources, more inefficiencies that erode profit margins, and more lost referrals.

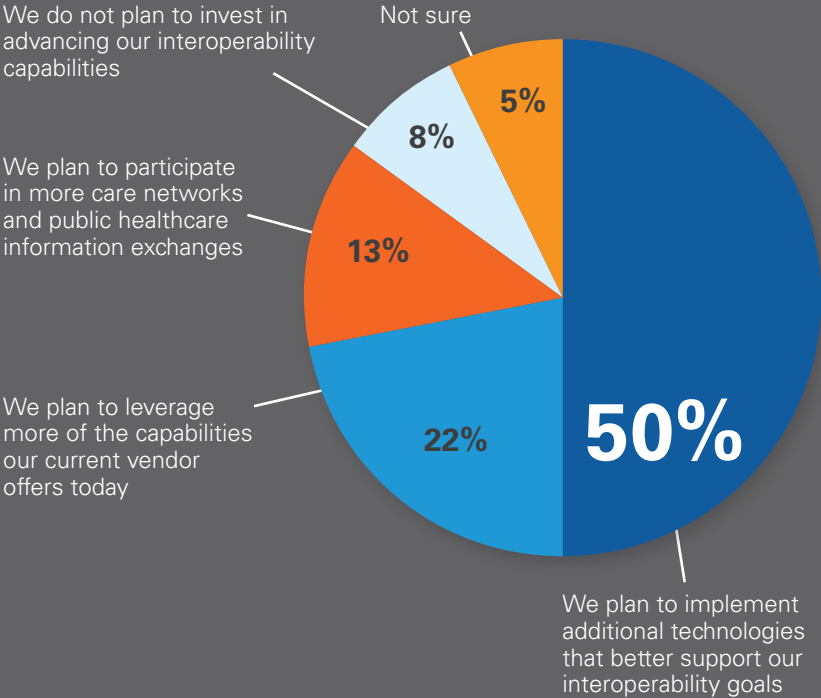


Lack of advanced interoperability impacts staff productivity and referral relationships.

When we dig further into how HME providers and pharmacies plan to advance their interoperability capabilities, **50%** are planning to implement additional technologies that better support their interoperability goals. Another **22%** plan to make better use of the capabilities their EHR/PMS system offer them today, and **13%** plan to participate more aggressively in care networks and public healthcare information exchanges.



How do you plan to advance your interoperability capabilities?



Because they're reaping the benefits of advanced interoperability, **66%** plan to continue to increase their interoperability capabilities over the next two years.

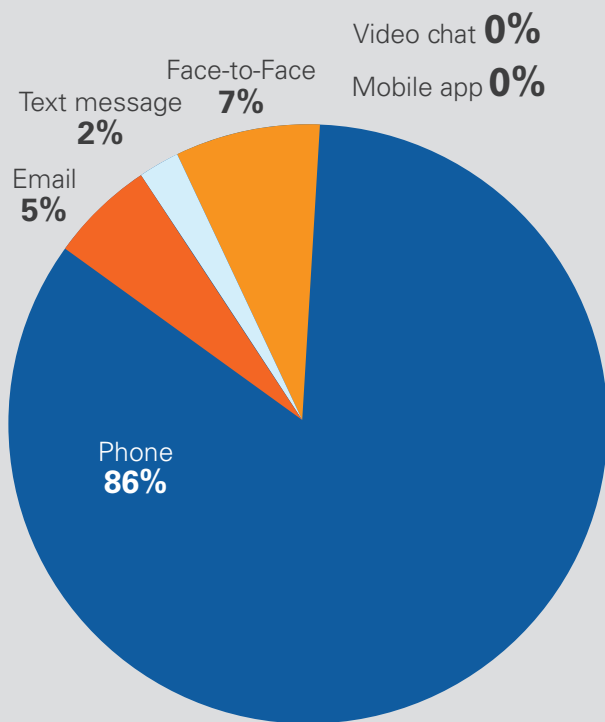
This tells us that the winners of the interoperability game are likely to continue to win more referrals, as **99%** of referral sources say they are likely to send more referrals to providers who are more capable of receiving orders electronically.

A new paradigm of interoperability

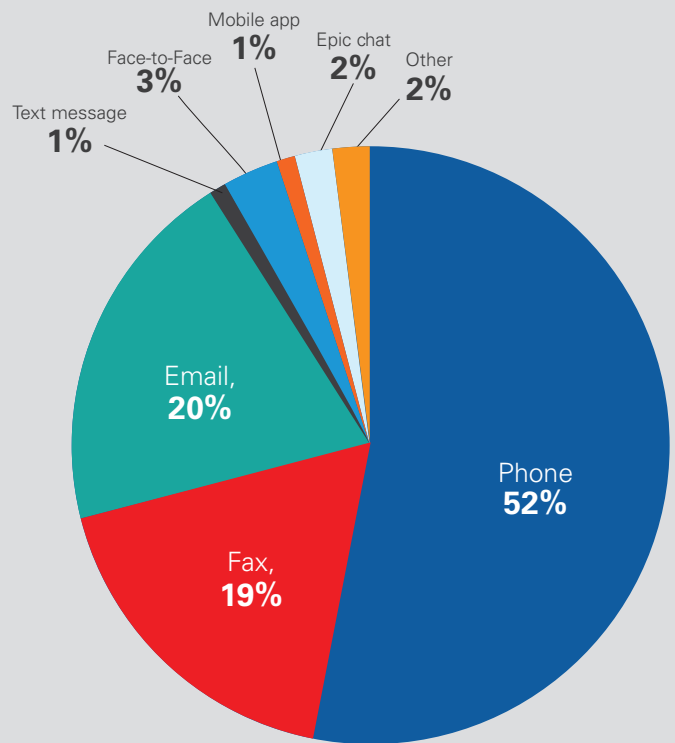
While the traditional definition of interoperability has focused on healthcare providers exchanging patient data and documentation between disparate systems, the same concept can be applied to the sharing of data and documentation between disparate care team members, whether they are medical, such as physician specialists, or non-medical, such as family members and patients.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of post-acute providers are using outdated mechanisms such as phone calls and voicemails as their primary means of communication with both medical and non-medical care team members.

Which method does your organization primarily use to communicate with others outside of your organization?



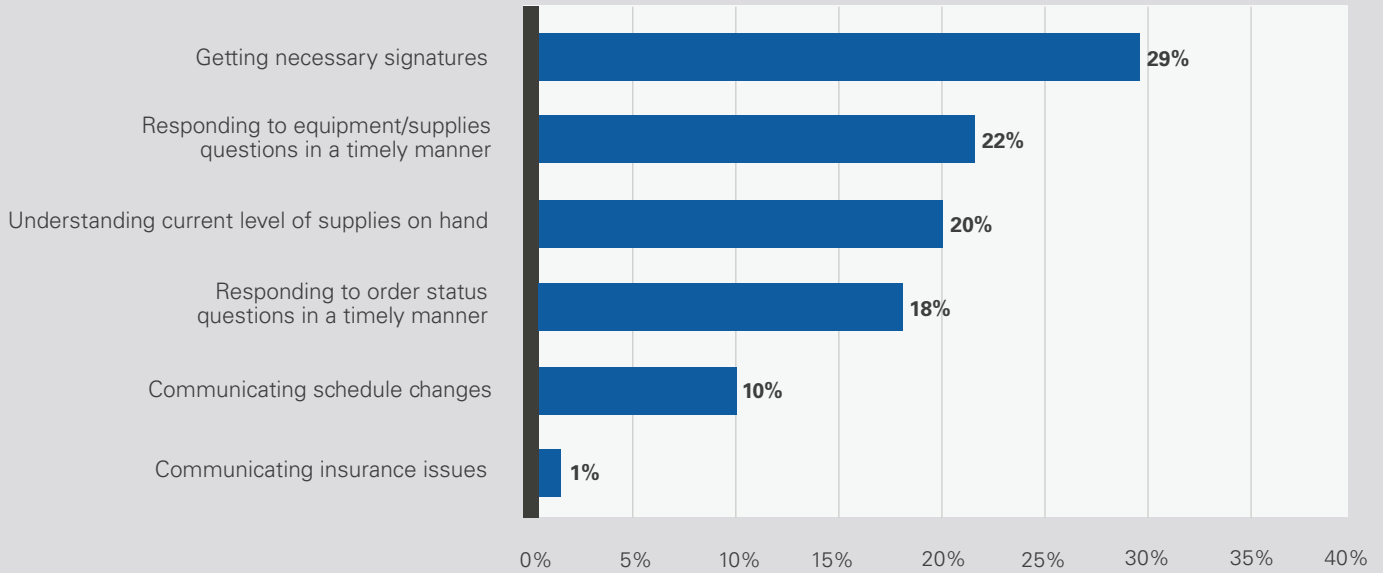
With Patients



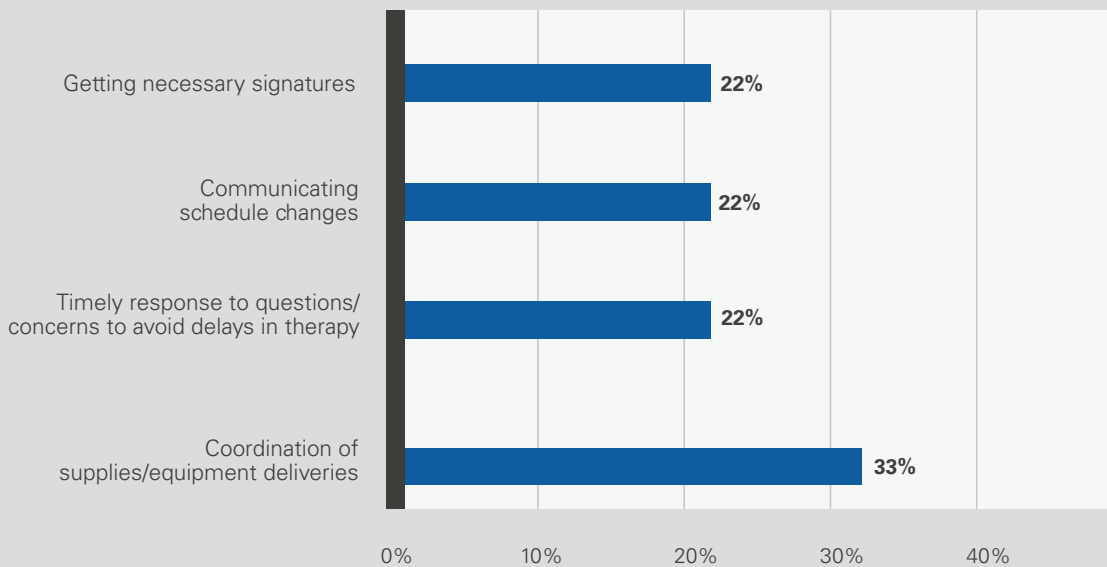
With Medical Professionals

These outdated communication and collaboration mechanisms can lead to many frustrations and waste that could be easily avoided with modern technology solutions like Brightree Digital Experience (DX) and CitusHealth.

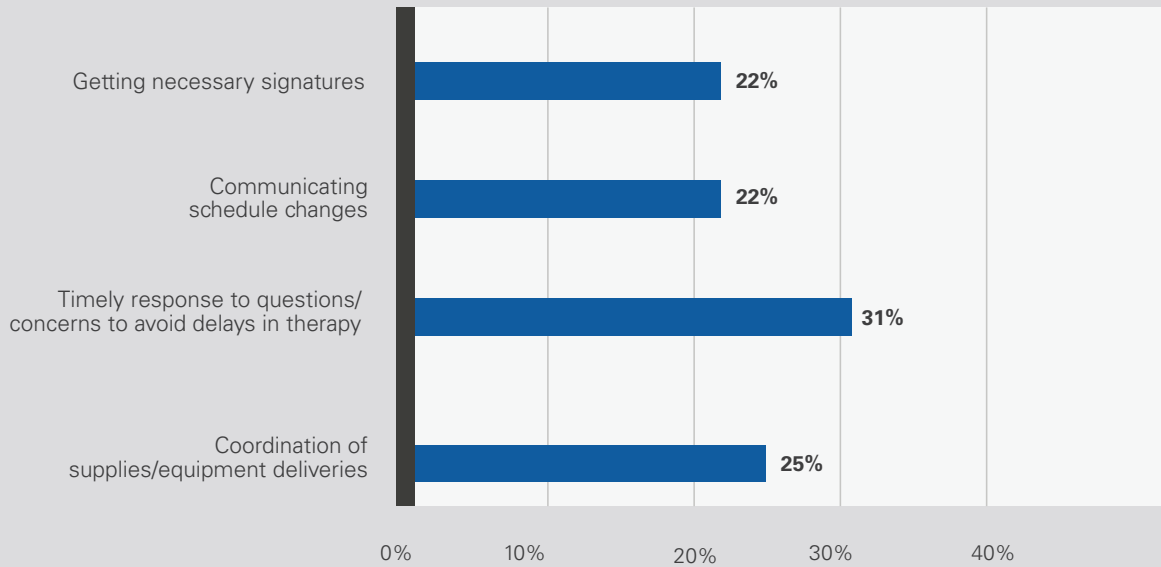
What are the top challenges your HME equipment/supplies team faces when communicating remotely with patients?



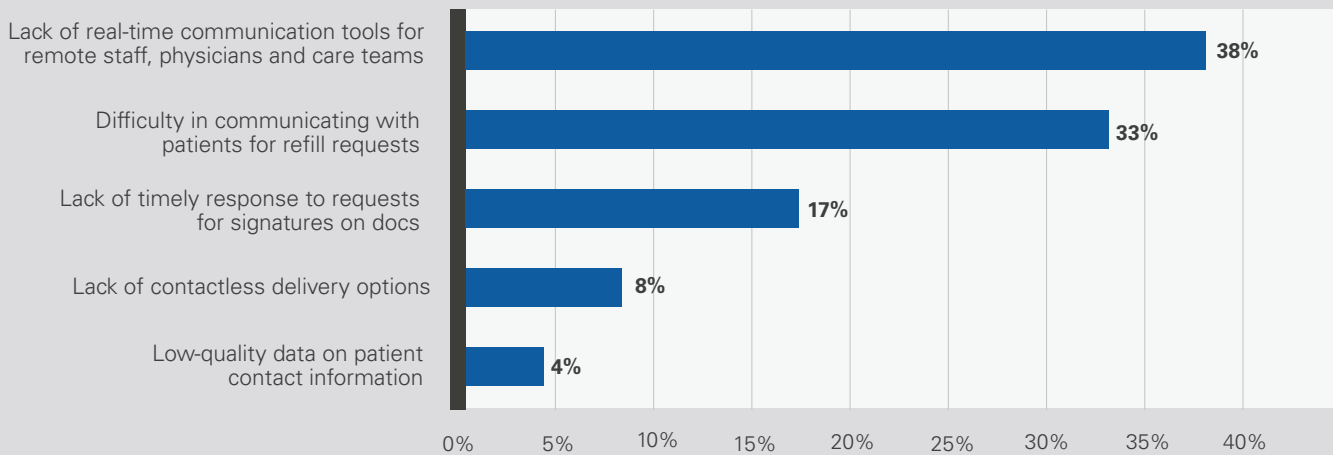
What are the top challenges your HME Pharmacy team faces when communicating remotely with patients?



What are the top challenges your home infusion pharmacy team faces when communicating remotely with patients?



What are the top challenges your specialty pharmacy team faces when communicating remotely with patients?



A path to success

Those who appear to be the most satisfied with their vendors' ability to meet their interoperability needs are Brightree customers, with **90%** of customers reporting to be either very or somewhat satisfied with the interoperability capabilities made available to them through solutions like ePrescribe and Brightree ReSupply. This is more than double the satisfaction from the next closest vendor — but not surprising since Brightree has embraced industry-wide interoperability initiatives for years. In fact, Brightree was the first post-acute care solution provider to join the **CommonWell Health Alliance**[®], a network of major EHR vendors and other healthcare stakeholders that have come together to drive health data exchange to improve care coordination and health outcomes nationwide. **Others include:**

Carequality

An interoperability framework that supports standards-based health information exchange between multi-platform networks, providers and EHR and HIE vendors.

The PACIO Project

A collaborative effort to advance interoperable health data exchange between post-acute care and other providers, patients, and key stakeholders across healthcare and to promote health data exchange in collaboration with policy makers, standards organizations, and industry through a consensus-based, use case-driven approach.

Direct Trust

A non-profit, vendor-neutral alliance of hundreds of vendors working together to develop, promote, and, as necessary, help enforce the rules and best practices necessary to maintain security and trust within its trust community.

A bright future

For HME providers and pharmacies, it's never been more critical to ensure your business is running on and optimizing highly interoperable technologies. These systems hold the key to addressing your top business challenges:

What are your top 3 business challenges in 2023 other than the supply chain?

60%

Hiring and retaining qualified staff

54%

Increasing the number of referrals

50%

Increasing efficiencies to support profit margins

Interoperable solutions reduce the administrative burden placed on your staff by laborious manual processes. They also align your organization directly with your referral sources' goals for more seamless, electronic sharing of important patient data and documentation. And finally, interoperable solutions help drive extreme efficiencies across your business, which directly and positively impact your bottom line.

To learn more about how your organization can benefit from highly interoperable billing and business management solutions, visit www.brightree.com.