**DC DAMO**

# Sentara®

# TRANSFORMING PATIENT EXPERIENCE

## Standardizing and Optimizing Contact Centers at a Large Health System

Sentara Health faced challenges in delivering a consistent patient experience across fragmented contact centers. After developing the Clinical Access Center, Sentara continued to partner with Damo to unite its remaining stand-alone contact centers and improve the overall patient experience, efficiency, decision-making, and collaboration. Standardized processes, centralized knowledge management, and a governance framework enhanced patient care, staff productivity, and career development.

## ABOUT THE CLIENT AND THE PROJECT

Sentara Health is an integrated, not-for-profit, health care delivery system. Sentara is one of the largest health systems in the U.S. Mid-Atlantic and Southeast, and among the top 20 largest not-for-profit integrated health systems in the country, with 30,000 employees, 12 hospitals in Virginia and Northeastern North Carolina, and the Sentara Health Plans division, which serves more than 1 million members in Virginia and Florida. With more than 1,500 quality physicians and advanced practice providers, they complete more than 2.8 million patient visits annually. With a vast network of ambulatory and hospital services, Sentara encountered challenges in ensuring a consistent patient experience across all touchpoints. To enhance the patient's journey, Sentara partnered with Damo in 2023 to create the Clinical Access Center to centralize scheduling for 282 primary and specialty care practices using streamlined processes and workflows.

Following the success of the Clinical Access Center, Sentara again enlisted Damo to develop and execute a strategy for uniting its remaining stand-alone contact centers to continue to improve the overall patient experience. The objective was for Damo to provide a framework to enable enhanced decision-making and offer a comprehensive inventory for

## CHALLENGES

Sentara faced operational and service challenges within its 13 contact centers. The following example highlights the patient experience.

*Zahra, a high school teacher who had recently moved to Virginia Beach, needed to establish a Primary Care Provider (PCP) through her Sentara Health insurance plan. Due to a lack of cross-functional collaboration, she had to interact with more than six different teams across five verticals, each providing varied experiences and information.*

This fragmented process led to frustration and an inconsistent patient experience that did not align with Sentara's vision for a seamless patient care experience across all services.

Key challenges included:

- **Lack of Cross-Functional Collaboration**: Teams operated in isolation, resulting in inefficiencies and uneven service delivery.
- **Inconsistent Documentation and Processes**: Different contact centers and teams used varying methods to document patient interactions, creating confusion and delays.
- **Operational Inefficiencies**: Unscheduled leave dates, network and application problems, and inadequate recruiting and training resources hindered overall productivity.
- **Non-Standardized Knowledge Management**: Agents did not have access to a centralized knowledge management system, resulting in inconsistent information being provided to patients.
- **Fragmented Transfer Processes**: Transfers to other teams, such as nurse triage, were misaligned, leading to further disconnection in the patient experience.

## APPROACH

Sentara sought to enhance its quality of care by assisting patients in finding the appropriate care with minimal obstacles and improving access to ambulatory services. They aimed to optimize and standardize their contact centers to provide a uniform experience at every patient interaction.

To help Sentara build these enduring relationships with their patients throughout their unique care experiences and life journeys, Damo built and implemented a plan to identify and classify all contact centers comprehensively and created a roadmap for unification, including:

- Developing a comprehensive strategy that designates the Clinical Access Center as a Sentara Center of Excellence staffed by a highly virtual, highly flexible hybrid workforce – 75% virtual and 25% in the office.
- Providing decentralized contact centers with access to Clinical Access Center support teams, including learning and development, workforce management, quality assurance, program management, governance, HR, and recruiting.
- Establishing a centralized knowledge base for all contact center staff.
- Creating a decision model to prioritize the unification of contact center teams strategically.
- Designing a governance structure that would align all contact centers under a unified vision of providing a seamless patient experience and engagement across all Sentara contact centers.

Key steps in Damo's inventory assessment included:

- **Designing an Enterprise Contact Center Steering Committee**: Composed of contact center leaders, the committee was tasked with developing standardized operating principles, success metrics, and consistent customer service terminology.
- **Data Collection and Analysis**: Damo conducted 40 interviews across 22 teams, identifying 11 centralized contact centers and several decentralized teams. The team analyzed 14 data points to assess readiness and prioritize the unification sequence of contact centers.
- **Creation of a Decision Framework and Prioritization Model**: The framework allowed Sentara executives to evaluate the maturity of contact centers and prioritize their integration based on effort versus ability.
- **Expansion of Clinical Access Center's Role**: Damo leveraged the Clinical Access Center's shared services and expertise to develop frameworks for contact center management, extending support to additional centers.
- **System-Wide Knowledge Management**: A centralized knowledge management system was selected to standardize information sharing and support optimization efforts across all contact centers.
- **Evaluation of Decentralized Teams**: Damo assessed the roles of decentralized teams to identify opportunities for integration with contact centers, improving overall operational efficiency.

# RESULTS

The collaboration created significant opportunities for standardizing and optimizing Sentara's contact centers, resulting in tangible benefits for the organization, its staff, and its patients through:

- **Data-Driven Decision Making**: The decision framework and prioritization model equipped executives with the necessary tools to evaluate the readiness of contact centers and make informed choices regarding resource allocation and integration priorities.
- **Unified Contact Centers**: Damo's decision framework and prioritization model were utilized to unify contact centers across another business division, ensuring a seamless service experience for patients.
- **Leveraging the Clinical Access Center**: The Clinical Access Center was established as a Center of Excellence within the organization, resulting in measurable improvements in therapy visits, new patient scheduling, and other key performance indicators.
- **Standardized Career Pathways in the Clinical Access Center**: The Clinical Access Center offered employees from various contact centers standardized career advancement opportunities by developing and implementing a leveling system, which created clear pathways for career growth and improved employee retention and satisfaction.
- **Improved Cross-Functional Collaboration**: Sentara Health enhanced collaboration between teams by unifying contact centers and standardizing success metrics, resulting in a more cohesive service experience.

# CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the partnership between Damo and Sentara successfully addressed the operational and patient experience challenges stemming from the organization's fragmented contact centers. Through a careful and systematic inventory that included strategic planning, governance design, and standardization initiatives, Sentara is now better positioned to unify its contact centers to provide a consistent, high-quality patient experience across its ambulatory and hospital services.

To learn how Damo can help you, email us at info@damoconsulting.net or fill out this form.

DAMO

Damo Consulting provides digital transformation advisory services to enable healthcare organizations to navigate the technology-enabled transition to telehealth and virtual care. We bring deep industry knowledge, market insights and technology skills to help develop and implement enterprise digital roadmaps.

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