



The Writer's Guide to Patient Journeys

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Chapter 1

What is a Patient Journey?

A **Patient Journey** is a long-form narrative that tells the story of what a real patient with real problems and real results went through during the extent of their diagnosis and the treatment you provided them.

Sometimes, it's about how someone with naturally small breasts found confidence after a breast augmentation. Other times are about how an older woman was able to garden after having her varicose veins treated. The possibilities are endless, but the result is the same: you give potential patients someone from your practice to relate to, showing them that **someone just like them has been through this before, and these are the changes you can make in their lives.**

This builds a profoundly personal relationship between you and these potential patients, increasing the chance that they will convert from potential to current patients.

You probably have a few questions. Luckily for you, we have a few answers.

In this guide, you will find (almost) everything you need to know about getting started with your Patient Journey program.

What a Patient Journey Does Look Like

Patient Journeys are much more of a narrative craft than other content you can find on the internet. We aren't implying that those pages don't need to be well-crafted, but we are saying that Patient Journeys rely on a different set of storytelling techniques.

They rely on compelling storytelling and the human element to garner attention, empathy and relatability from its readers. It takes some time to fully tell that story, so these pieces can often be released in two or three parts.

What a Patient Journey Doesn't Look Like

When you think about getting a patient's opinion and story, it is easy to draw a parallel to online reviews

— especially when those reviews are the same size as a novella. After all, those more or less tell the patient's perspective, right?

Wrong. Despite the Yelp dissertations people write nowadays, Patient Journeys still need a lot more space than online reviews really allow. This is how you create something more attention grabbing and visceral than a social media caption.

Good Examples of Patient Journey Content

We've talked a bit about what a Patient Journey should be, so let's run through some successful examples of this type of content from actual clients and patients.

March 31, 2022 calveins

Happy Endings and Sore Memories



At 14 years old, Dylan looks down at her feet nervously. She is in the middle of giving a heavily graded book report to her classmates. Summer school is usually pretty relaxed, but, as a young teen with a severe case of stage fright, this very well could be her worst nightmare. To make matters worse, she has just forgotten what she was supposed to say next.

Before her partner has a chance to whisper the following line, she sees something peculiar on her leg. It's a slight bulge right above her ankle bone, almost like something was swelling and pushing the skin outward. Dylan didn't think much of it at the time, but the image was burned into her memory. This would mark the start of her 13-year-long journey with a painful and frustrating condition known as [varicose veins](#).

A Brief Summary of Varicose Veins

Varicose veins are a medical condition that occurs when superficial veins — usually those in the legs and thighs — become twisted and enlarged. Their appearance is very recognizable; most people know someone who has varicose veins. According to [Healthline](#), about 25 percent of all adults have some degree of this condition.



9ylan
29 Palms



Liked by officialvjbaros and 105 others

9ylan 💜 Legs brought to you by @californiaveins 💜

People with it often experience pain, swelling, heaviness and achiness near the problematic vein. There are many causes of varicose veins, such as family history, genetics, obesity, standing for long periods, menopause, pregnancy, and simply being over the age of 50. Luckily, there are also many treatments available to patients with the condition. Unlucky for Dylan, though, that no one close to her knew that treatment was an option.

Dylan, California Vein Specialists

Here is an excerpt from the beginning of this Patient Journey:

"At 14 years old, Dylan looks down at her feet nervously. She is in the middle of giving a heavily graded book report to her classmates. Summer school is usually pretty relaxed, but, as a young teen with a severe case of stage fright, this very well could be her worst nightmare. To make matters worse, she has just forgotten what she was supposed to say next.

Before her partner has a chance to whisper the following line, she sees something peculiar on her leg. It's a slight bulge right above her ankle bone, almost like something was swelling and pushing the skin outward. Dylan didn't think much of it at the time, but the image was burned into her memory. This would mark the start of her 13-year-long journey with a painful and frustrating condition known as varicose veins."

This introduction alone is enough to fill most online reviews or social media captions, but for a Patient Journey, it is **just the beginning** of the narrative. The reader might have stumbled upon 1,000,000 results when they Googled "varicose vein treatment near me," but stories like Dylan's are much less common and just flat out more enjoyable.

Erin has many identities. She is a wife, a mother of twin boys, a psychotherapist — and for much of her life, she was, in her own words, “the large-breasted woman.” Since adolescence, she’d felt defined by her breasts. They influenced the clothes she wore, the attention she received, the activities she could comfortably participate in and the pain she felt on an increasingly regular basis. Both physically and emotionally, they were a burden she carried for decades before deciding to have breast reduction surgery.

The Start of the Journey

Erin was a teenager the first time she became conscious of her breast size.

Erin's Journey: Taking Action (Part 2)

BEFORE & AFTERS SCHEDULE A CONSULTATION

“You’re never going to be rid of me unless you consider plastic surgery.”

With those blunt words of warning from her chiropractor, Erin was finally ready to make the decision she’d been putting off for 20 years. She was tired of the limited clothing options, the chronic neck and shoulder pain, and the struggle to be physically active with her young twin boys. She was done being defined by her breasts.

The Road to Dr. Sharma

Erin calls this conversation with her chiropractor her “come-to-Jesus moment.” She’d considered breast reduction surgery in her 20s, when she was in graduate school, but ultimately decided that the timing wasn’t right. She had a thesis to finish, then a career as a psychotherapist to build and a family to start. Surgery would have to wait.

PLASTIC SURGERY AUSTIN
Sanjay K. Sharma, M.D., F.A.C.S.

Erin, Plastic Surgery Austin

Instead of the introduction, let’s take a look at some of the inner story from this excerpt about Erin, a breast reduction patient who dealt with back pain from her overly large bust:

“Erin went on to graduate, launch her career and have the family she’d always wanted. Beneath the professional success and personal milestones, however, pain had become a daily feature of Erin’s life.

“I was in constant pain. My husband was doing what he could to help me out. I was spending gobs of money on chiropractors and physical therapists and massage therapists. I was grouchy. But at that point, it was just my life. It was normal. I’d been in chronic pain for so long that I didn’t recognize the toll it was taking on my demeanor and the kind of mom I was able to be.”

If anyone with back pain came across this story, they would immediately form a bond with the subject of this story. You can imagine some of the follow-up questions: How is her pain now? How long did it take to get back to normal? Does she regret it? Is the doctor she chose a good one? How can I do what she did? Erin goes on to answer each of these in the full Patient Journey piece.

Sara, New Reflections

Sara, a 19-year-old, once heard her friends making fun of a woman who had a labiaplasty. Because of this, she was nervous to ever talk about or deal with her own vaginal concerns. Eventually, when her anatomy started to cause her discomfort and pain, she decided to finally deal with that insecurity with Dr. Patel. To her great joy, the recovery process was a breeze.

"... Sara followed Dr. Patel's post-op advice and things quickly got better. 'I kept my bandages on for a day or two, then I just kept applying Neosporin, and that was pretty much it. That, and keep taking the medication. That was my routine.' It didn't take long for her to feel like herself again, and she was up and about just a week after her surgery.

'It was quick, a lot faster than I thought,' she says about the recovery process. "I honestly thought it would take longer. Within that week, I felt pretty good. I was walking a lot better and actually went out shopping," she laughs. "Then after two weeks, I went back to work and I went back to school. You can't miss a lot of days, so I was very happy about that."

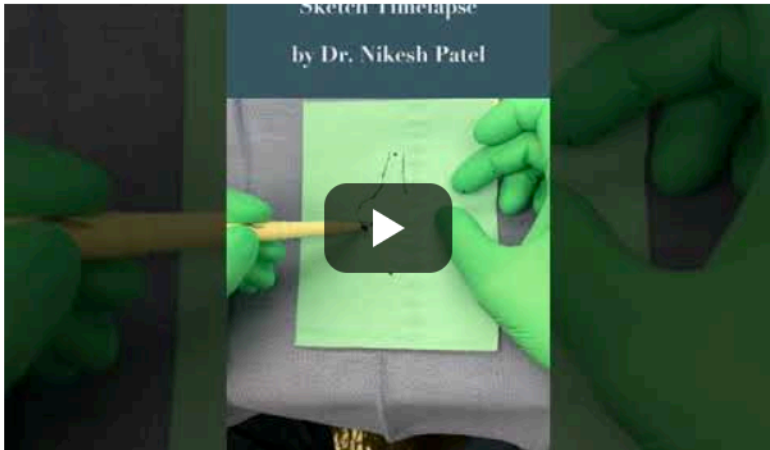
You don't need to think hard about how reassuring this passage would be to someone who was worried about the recovery process or afraid of surgery in general.

solution to her problem. The pain, discomfort and feeling that she was missing out on something

New Reflections
Plastic Surgery
NIKESH K. PATEL MD

"It was more than a thought," she says. "It was a real problem."

Sketch Timeline
by Dr. Nikesh Patel



In this video, Dr. Nikesh Patel creates Sara's "Before" sketch. Check out Part 2 of Sara's Journey to Her Labiaplasty to see the "After!"

The Struggle is Real

Sara is a cosmetology student, working to pay her way through school. Even at the age of 19, she knew what she wanted to do for a living. She loved doing hair and connecting with others, so she took steps to make her dream a reality. Now she's taking classes while working at a beauty supply store.

"I love what I do. I like talking to people, getting to know people... and I wanna keep doing it. And learn new things, of course, like hair dye. It's a lot, but I can't wait to learn more. I've done every color in the book — I'm obsessed!"

Chapter 2

Why Are Patient Journeys Important

We've briefly covered the power of storytelling already. But to really understand why Patient Journeys are so compelling, you have to understand that while humans have a reputation for being storytellers, they are, to a much greater degree, **story consumers**.

After all, behind every story **told**, there are an infinite number of potential people **consuming** said story. The idea behind Patient Journeys is to tap into a deep psychological need for a good story. Pamela Rutledge, Ph.D., from *Psychology Today* explains it like this:

"To the human brain, imagined experiences are processed the same as real experiences. Stories create genuine emotions, presence (the sense of being somewhere), and behavioral responses."

Patient Journeys Solve 3 Modern Content Problems

The internet presents nearly as many challenges as it does conveniences. Finding ways to overcome those obstacles is not only advantageous, it is necessary. Three of those biggest challenges are trust, authenticity and attention. Patient Journeys manage to take on all three.

Problem 1: Trust

49% of people trusted online customer reviews as much as personal recommendations

62% of consumers believe that they have **seen a fake customer review** in the last year for a local business (i.e., someone like you)

What does this mean? It shows that people care about online reviews, but they are also not naive enough to think they can blindly trust everything on Google or Yelp. A Patient Journey is the next step in the evolution of online reviews, a game-changing opportunity to fully immerse prospective patients in the experience of their peers. Essentially, online reviews may earn you trust, but Patient Journeys help you earn trust *and* patients.

Problem 2: Authenticity

Authenticity is the feeling that content is made specifically for a patient's educational or informational needs, not something that feels like they just stumbled onto a sales page. As Google expands its understanding of its users, it increasingly favors content meeting that criteria. One of the metrics that Google uses to decide how useful a visitor found a particular web page is a term called "Time on Page."

Time on Page is exactly how it sounds. It is a hard count of the seconds that visitors spend on the page. Here is the even better news: **people spend more time on Patient Journey content than they do on a standard procedure page or blog.** To build an authentic online experience in the eyes of your patients (and Google), Patient Journeys are one of the most powerful tools in your arsenal.



Patient Journeys can increase time on page by

164%

Problem 3: Attention

Getting a potential patient's attention is a difficult problem. You have an endless amount of content fighting for the same attention pool. Here are just some obstacles you are facing and how Patient Journeys solve them.

Problems:

You have six seconds to grab someone's attention
Most people will only spend two minutes on your site
48% of your visitors will "bounce" from your site



Solutions:

Using relatability to capture attention immediately
Creating investment in the reader and their personal journey
Offering patients opportunities to learn more about relevant topics

Patient Journeys Get You More Patients

Patient Journeys increase the **quantity** of converted patients and provide higher **quality** leads.

Quantity	Quality
Patient Journeys convert patients at a higher rate than other content.	Patients are more viscerally connected to you and your practice.
Patients Journeys improve your search performance by improving key metrics.	Patients are more informed about the treatment process.
Patients who have their journey shared are more likely to refer others to your practice.	Patients' expectations have been appropriately set with real-world examples.

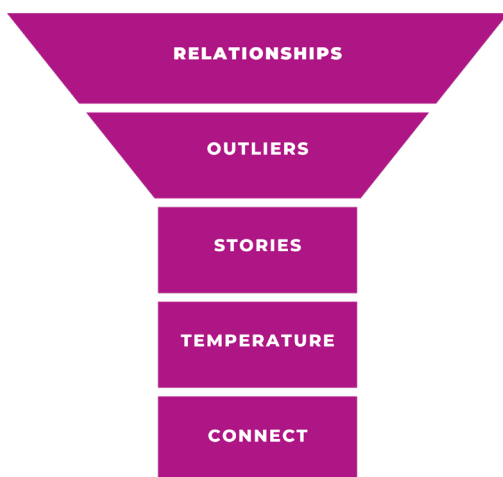
Chapter 3

How to Create Your Patient Journey

So far, we've talked about Patient Journeys in a theoretical sense. But for this section, we are going to talk about the details of storytelling and how to create a compelling and captivating piece of content for your practice.

Identifying Your Patient(s)

Here are five major steps you need to take in order to identify potential Patient Journey subjects.



The goal of this particular funnel is not to eliminate your candidates down to one. Instead, our aim is to identify and convert as many patients into potential subjects as possible. Some elimination is necessary in the beginning, but as we move down the steps, the focus is less on paring down your options and

more on capitalization, which is why this funnel doesn't get all that narrow.

Start With Good Relationships. At its core, a Patient Journey requires that the subject have a positive story to tell about you and your practice. Usually, strong relationships will have naturally developed during their treatment process. Reach out to those patients first since they will likely have the most to say about their experience.

Remove the Outliers. Good relationships are great, but there are some general best practices to follow when selecting a good Patient Journey candidate. You generally want to stay away from procedures that:

You don't perform often (even if they are in your wheelhouse)
You aren't particularly known for or interested in promoting
Have a low ROI or are low-ticket items

Find the Real Story. We talk about it much more in-depth below in our interview guidelines, but during your selection process, you should always consider what someone's story is outside of the treatment they had performed. How was their life affected? What trauma were they dealing with? What makes this person interesting outside of the care you provided?

Editor's Note: You and your staff should identify those who have fascinating stories as soon as the initial consultation. A great back story is so important, and if you identify them early, you can elevate your patient Journey to start the process at Day 1.

Connect Them With Your Marketing Agency. Most of the time, world-class medical professionals like yourself aren't also world-class writers. Maybe you are the exception to the rule, of course, but if you need some help in the writing and interviewing department, all you have to do is connect the person with content marketing professionals.

Gathering Efficient Notes

One of the big skills that writers learn early on is how to take practical notes during an interview. You don't need to note every word. What you should do is use shorthand to jot down important tidbits and save the verbatim note-taking for the important quotes.

Pro Tip: Set up some cameras and microphones to record the interview and get some effective multimedia content.

Finding the Color in Your Story

We are going to give you two passages to read. I want you to make a mental note about which one was more exciting:

Passage 1:

Sally woke up one morning and decided she wanted to have a breast augmentation. She had been considering it for a long time, but a friend of hers actually gave her a recommendation. Since her friend’s results looked good, Sally decided it might be worth the consultation time.

Passage 2:

Sally woke up one Tuesday morning as she always does: half-awake and in need of her favorite espresso. As she stumbles to her closet, she looks at her long line of summer dresses. She grabs one with a yellow floral pattern and slips it on. As she straightens it out, the same thought enters her mind that she has every morning: *I really wish I could fill out this dress better.*

She remembers having a conversation with Angelica, a friend she met in college years ago, about a doctor she went to see for a breast augmentation. He was a local doctor, and since having her work done, Angelica has been wearing a lot more clothing to show off her new curves. Plus, she looked killer at the beach last week. Sally decided that it might be time for her to schedule that consultation Angelica kept recommending.

Which passage moves you more? When we say finding the color of a story is important, we are talking about the details of that person’s life that will help readers become attached. When you are interviewing, these are the details you need to be on the hunt for.

Outlining Your Story

Every writer has a different outlining process, so it may take some trial and error for you to figure it out. To help get you there, we have three outlining methods for you developed explicitly for Patient Journeys: chronological, the full circle, and compare and contrast.

Chronological	Full Circle	Compare / Contrast
Lay out notes in chronological order	Start with the result, “patient felt good about her body	Identify several aspects of the patient’s life that were affected
Create appropriate chronological sections	Then start at the beginning and tell the story of how she got there	Notate the before and after conditions
Insert quotes into appropriate areas	Occasionally drop references to the intro	Organize them in order of importance and impact
Follow up to fill holes in the narrative	Find strong transitions for the sections	Insert quotes into appropriate areas

Writing Your Patient’s Story

Once you have your outlines down, writing it should be much easier. Don’t get too bogged down by the medical jargon. Try to stick to the storytelling elements as though you were writing a short story completely detached from your medical practice. Focus on getting into your flow — from the brain to the fingers to the page. Eventually, the usual things that inhibit your ability to articulate yourself in writing will disappear. Come back later and edit once the paint has had some time to dry. There are a million strategies that writers use to create powerful stories. You just have to figure out which of those are good for you.

Using Voice to Your Advantage

Part of creating a Patient Journey is showing potential clients the kind of professional you are. Your content’s voice should reflect your personal identity. Tone and writing style are two components of voice — if you are warm and welcoming, don’t write it in the same tone as a medical study. If you want to be seen as a leader in the industry and consummate professional, use an elevated style with more advanced language and more sophisticated syntax.

Chapter 4

Are Patient Journeys Right for Me?

We know you might have some reservations about whether they are something you can realistically take on. So, let's talk about it.

Is It Worth the Investment?

What is the cost of a Patient Journey? \$0 if you DIY — no cost but your time. If you work with a content writer or agency, you might be looking at \$1,500 to \$2,500, but much less time. Consider how much time it'll realistically cost you to do this yourself. Is it economically worth the hours you'll lose? Probably not. Is the content itself worth doing via a professional? **YES.**

Is It Worth the Time?

We have yet to meet someone in the medical industry who doesn't want their practice to continue growing. You might

be the first, but we are willing to bet that there is something you are working toward — some goal or benchmark that you want to achieve. More patients? Better client security? A second location? More staff? Diversified procedures? If you are hoping any of those things are on your horizon, putting some time into a Patient Journey can yield hefty ROIs, making it well worth the time you will be investing.

Do I Have the Patients?

A lot of times, we have found that clients are much more critical of themselves than their patients are. The work you do is important to people — it addresses some of their biggest insecurities and most personal and vulnerable aspects of themselves. If you help them work through that, there are bound to be people who rightfully associate you with that change. So, do you have the patients?

Yes, you do.

Am I Breaking Patient Privacy Laws?

In addition to your standard release on your intake form, we highly recommend that all patients who are identified for this process sign a specific Patient Journey release. You should also make sure your marketing company handles these stories in a way that is 100% compliant with whatever governing laws are applicable to you and your practice. If you follow these pointers, are you breaking the law? **Nope; not even a little.**



Chapter 5

How to Share Your Patient Journey

Now we have to get your Patient Journeys out into the world. One of the best things about Patient Journeys is that they are multi-use marketing tools that can be used in many different ways, such as:

Website

Your website is the cornerstone of your digital marketing program. All roads (ideally) lead back to your website. This is because it is the one digital space you have complete control over — you can decide precisely what your tone and personality are and project that to potential patients. You aren't limited by character counts or bombarded by open reviews. Your website is your space, and a Patient Journey is an excellent addition to that space.

Newsletter

Email marketing is essential. It keeps you top-of-mind to those who have ever been interested in your practice or having treatment performed. Sometimes, finding content to support email campaigns can be a challenge. But a good quote from a real patient is a priceless addition to any newsletter or email. The best part is that all you have to do is copy and paste — not much new content is needed for this medium.

Social Media

If your website is the bread and butter of your digital marketing program, social media is the viral birria tacos recipe that will help you connect with a huge portion of the online population. Even if you don't use it for reaching new audiences, a lot of your potential patients will be looking at your social media to see if you are active and get a better sense of your personality. Imagine if during that research they came across a post that connected with them and led them to one of your Patient Journeys. (And eventually... into your practice.)

Advertising

Ads are a tried-and-true method of making sure that you get eyes on your practice. But figuring out an advertisement that works is both art and science. You have to really understand what your potential patients are looking for in order to make an ad that will scratch whatever itch they have. Many people seeking out information about an aesthetic procedure are looking for someone they trust to perform it. As we've explained in multiple sections in this guide, one of the easiest ways to have someone trust you is to let someone else do the convincing. This approach is much more sincere (and compelling) to a general audience.

Guest Posting

We know after spending all this time doing interviews, outlining, building content and ultimately getting the fantastic story of your patients ready, the last thing you want to do is hand it over to someone else to publish. But there is power in guest posting for different sites, and we would never sacrifice that content for something that wasn't worth it. Backlinks, additional traffic, new audiences — all of this is the price that you **can be paid** for allowing your content to live on a different, well-chosen site. Plus, here's the good news: there is more than one way to write a story, and if you think we can't stretch our creativity enough to make additional content, give us a chance to show you how wrong you are.

Pro Tip: If you really want to capitalize on your Patient Journeys, turn them into a paid ads campaign on social media and Google. With the proper audience segmentation on various platforms, you can target specific groups who will convert at the highest rates.

Conclusion

Patient Journeys are powerful, and if you do them right, they can add a ton of value and provide a huge return on whatever investment you make into them.

The process doesn't have to be complicated, or expensive, or feel like you are trying to climb Everest — you can do this, we believe in you. But if you ever need help, give us a call.

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