

Women Are Driving Healthcare:

How Recent Trends are Changing Healthcare Delivery for Women

To provide the best possible care experience, healthcare providers need to adapt to changing social and demographic trends for the #1 healthcare consumer: women.

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, women are the most active healthcare decision-makers and users. Significant data supports the need for healthcare providers to recognize their value and transform their practices to serve them.

A recent study shows that [78% of women identified themselves as the primary household healthcare decision-maker](#) and women now account for **nearly 60%** of all inpatient healthcare visits. Increased utilization rates mean women obtain **33.33% more** care over their lifetime than men, according to national research.^[1]



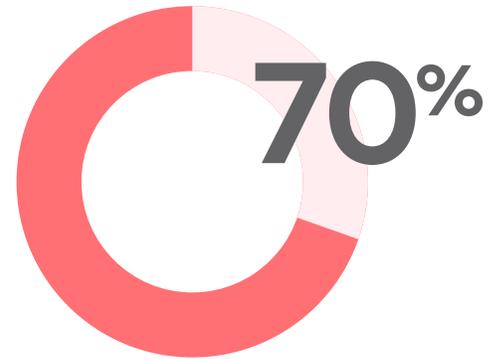


To coincide with its 2019 Women’s Care Specialty Excellence Awards release, Healthgrades explored three current trends that are affecting women’s care:

1. **Women are having children later in life**
2. **Women are experiencing increasingly complex pregnancies**
3. **Women are living longer and requiring increased health management**

These challenges bring new opportunities for hospitals and health systems to enhance the relationship with these highly-engaged healthcare consumers. Women are choosing providers who recognize their unique priorities and demonstrate excellence in women’s care.

Hospitals that adapt to this changing landscape and effectively differentiate their women’s care programs can nurture valuable, long-term relationships with this key patient segment.



Women are the primary healthcare decision-maker for their families and Healthgrades data supports that, with **women accounting for 70% of healthgrades.com** monthly visitors. With women being healthcare providers’ number one consumer, patient experiences and delivery should be tailored to their specific needs.

Women in the U.S. are postponing motherhood



The pursuit of higher education and career advancement, improvements in genetic testing and technology, and higher life expectancy are among the reasons women are delaying childbirth. In fact, first-time pregnancies among women over 40 are growing faster than among younger women. In research about birth rates in the United States, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed that in 2017, for the first time in a decade, women over 40 are the only age group with growing birth volumes. That year, **11.6 births per 1,000** were among **women 40-44**, **a 1% increase from 2016**. For women **over 45**, the number of births **rose 3% from 2016 to 2017**.

For this reason, it's imperative that not only hospitals, but OB/GYN practices create targeted content and communication experiences that emphasize older women and their unique needs. With increasing access to data, provider information, and care philosophies, women healthcare shoppers are more informed and digital-savvy than ever before. Due to these shifts in behavior, it's important that hospitals showcase information about high-risk OB services and develop a strategic approach to patient engagement. Surfacing information on affiliated OB practices whose providers advocate for less risky vaginal births and offer exceptional aftercare, whether delivery goes smoothly or there are unforeseen challenges, can drive engagement with mothers-to-be. These high-value consumers appreciate health systems, providers and practices that “get” digital and personalize communications to target them specifically.





To help engage mothers of all ages, hospitals and health systems should place special emphasis on their ability to provide the proper screening, prenatal, and postnatal care services—especially NICU and specialized services for newborns and infants. Similarly, building towards maternity represents another method of winning patients for hospitals since women shopping for maternity services represent a long-term relationship opportunity.

Many patients also have obstetrics as their hidden agenda when seeking gynecologic health services. In fact, research shows that **47% of new private payer OB/GYN** visits are self-referred women and **61% of childless women** say they intend to use their gynecologist for maternity services. Accordingly, hospitals would benefit from cultivating prospective maternity patients by nurturing relationships with women who are currently utilizing gynecologic services.



Healthgrades data also reinforces the demand for OB/GYN services, demonstrating:

- **"Obstetrics and Gynecology"** is one of the top provider specialties accessed on healthgrades.com via organic searches—accounting for more than **15 million entries** on the site each year.
- **"Doctors of Obstetrics and Gynecology"** are the fourth most commonly visited specialty on healthgrades.com—representing **over 12 million visits** in the last 12 months.
- **"Obstetrics and Gynecology"** is the **fifth most commonly searched phrase** on healthgrades.com.

Healthgrades' data supports the need for healthcare providers to reach the right patients with relevant content that demonstrates a deep understanding of their needs. By committing to these strategies long term, providers can drive new patient growth and maximize contribution margins through patient retention.

Increase of high-risk pregnancies and complications is challenging care delivery

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According to the CDC, for women of all ages, the rate of severe complications from **childbirth has almost tripled between 1993 and 2014**. The increase in pregnancy complexity and complications has several drivers including mothers with more chronic conditions, mothers giving birth later-in-life, and mothers not receiving adequate prenatal care.

The increased complication rate among mothers is in no small part a result of the increasing prevalence of chronic health issues. Conditions like hypertension, obesity, smoking, and drug use can significantly increase the risk of complications.^[2] Some pregnancy-specific complications could become chronic conditions that create a physical, emotional, and financial burden for the mother^[3].

The rise of later-in-life pregnancies is also a driver of more “complex” pregnancies; age is a significant risk factor, and with age comes an increased risk for complications such as gestational diabetes and pre-eclampsia. Women over 35 are also more likely to carry and deliver multiples^[4]. Mothers over 40 also have to contend with increased age-related risks during pregnancy and childbirth, including c-section, pelvic floor issues, and urinary incontinence.

While national trends show an increase in the birth rate for women 40+ and stagnation in the birth rate among other ages, many communities still see the average age of new mothers skew younger, into the low 20s. For these communities, and mothers in general, access to and utilization of prenatal care is of utmost importance for a complication-free pregnancy and birth. Prenatal care can help prevent complications and inform women about important steps they can take to protect their infant and ensure a healthy pregnancy. According to the NIH, prenatal care can reduce complications by enacting a plan to control pre-existing conditions and educate mothers on “pregnancy-safe” medicines, among many other benefits.^[5]



Providers also need to know what their outcomes data show as mothers are looking for this information online. In fact, in our new study Healthgrades compared hospitals with statistically better-than-expected performance (5 stars) as a group to those with statistically worse-than-expected performance (1 star) as a group over a three-year period. Healthgrades Women's Care Ratings Statistics confirm that:

- **From 2015-2017**, patients having a vaginal delivery in 5-star hospitals have, on average, a 43.5% lower risk of experiencing a complication while in the hospital than if they were treated by 1-star hospitals.*
- **From 2015-2017**, patients having a C-section in 5-star hospitals have, on average, a 57% lower risk of experiencing a complication while in the hospital than if they were treated by 1-star hospitals.*
- **From 2015-2017**, patients having a hysterectomy in hospitals ranked 5-star by Healthgrades have, on average, a 61.2% lower risk of experiencing a complication while in the hospital than if they were treated by hospitals rated 1-star.*
- **From 2015-2017**, patients having a gynecologic procedure in 5-star hospitals have, on average, a 63.5% lower risk of experiencing a complication while in the hospital than if they were treated by 1-star hospitals.*

*Statistics are based on Healthgrades analysis of all-payer data for years 2015-2017 and represent 3-year estimates for patients in 15 states for which all-payer data were made available.



Providers need to demonstrate that they recognize the physical and emotional risks associated with all pregnancies, especially [high-risk](#) pregnancies. Content should target women of all ages and backgrounds, but particularly the fastest growing group of mothers—**women over 40**.

Increased life expectancy for women means an increase in mid-to-late life care needs



As a whole, women in the U.S. are living longer with an average life expectancy of **81 years vs. 76** for the average man. Because of the rise in life expectancy for women, a healthy female retiring at age 65 in 2019 can expect to spend \$147,000 on healthcare expenses during retirement.^[6] However, the costs for their healthcare can start to increase well before that, often starting in mid-life.

Mid-life can bring with it challenges that can threaten overall health like obesity, high blood pressure, and diabetes. Women also need annual visits for routine preventative procedures such as pap smears, mammograms, colonoscopies, and blood work.^[7] The risk for certain types of cancers, such as gynecological cancer, can also increase with age.

In addition to continuing to need these other procedures, women, as they age, will seek more urogynecology, cardiology, gastroenterology, and osteoporosis treatment. Those issues can be even more important to track and treat, because **after age 50, four in five women** have one or more chronic health conditions. These healthcare requirements present opportunities for a cross-disciplinary approach to providing services to aging women.

Providers should also discuss the technologies used to reduce complications during [surgical procedures](#), address menopause symptoms, or provide information on how to reduce the risk of cardiac events. Marketing content should use warm, conversational language, but be data-driven and rich with useful information.



By creating content targeting this demographic of women and becoming a **'go-to' source of information** for them, you increase the chances of attracting new patients, gaining their loyalty, and retaining them for the long term.

Conclusion



These trends identify discrete opportunities for hospitals to better serve women in their communities and improve the quality of their women's care service lines. The importance of reaching, engaging, and serving a diverse group of women is greater than ever. To build long-term, loyal relationships with this key demographic, hospitals need to adapt to the changing landscape and favorably position their specialty women's care services.

Before hospitals build out their women's care strategies, there are several important questions that need to be addressed:

- *What is my hospital doing to prepare for complex pregnancies?*
- *What kind of support do clinicians at my hospital who are treating women with complex pregnancies and severe complications need to ensure the best outcome?*
- *How is our hospital preparing to serve the needs of women as they age and develop more chronic conditions?*
- *And, generally and specifically, what is my hospital doing to better inform and better care for the women in our community?*

Understand that quality performance is important to women.

Leveraging quality improvements, technological advances, practitioner recognition, and awards in your women's care program will be key to the success of your communication strategy, enabling reach and inspiring loyalty. Tell your target audience stories about how these aspects of your women's health practices lead to better quality care for themselves and their families.

To see the full list of **Healthgrades' 2019 Women's Care Excellence Award Recipients**, visit <https://www.healthgrades.com/quality/ratings-awards/reports/womens-care>



Sources



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About Healthgrades



Healthgrades is dedicated to empowering stronger and more meaningful connections between patients and their healthcare providers. At www.healthgrades.com, we help millions of consumers each month to find and schedule appointments with their provider of choice. With our scheduling solutions and advanced analytics applications, we help our health system clients representing over 1,500 hospitals across the country to cultivate new patient relationships, improve patient access, and build customer loyalty. At Healthgrades, better health gets a head start.

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