HOW CALIFORNIA'S #1 HEALTH SYSTEM TRANSFORMED ITS CHATBOT TO SAVE LIVES IN A PANDEMIC

To welcome patients in a time of crisis, UCLA Health created a digital doorway, ensuring those patients could get the care they needed for themselves and their families.

PROBLEM

The COVID-19 pandemic hit Los Angeles hard. Sirens clamored through our streets. Hospital beds were running out. And UCLA Health's call center was slammed. As the #1 health system in California (as ranked by U.S. News & World Report), our actions could save lives. Our leadership quickly stood up a Command Center to reimagine how care could be delivered, how appointments could be booked, and how patients could be served.

While the pandemic caught many by surprise, UCLA Health's physicians and researchers were poised for this fight. To address the demand and meet the needs of patients across our network (four hospitals, 200+ clinics), UCLA Health turned to technology to design a solution to serve Southern California.

INSIGHT

Our goal: Empower patients to get the care they seek and clarity they deserve. Panic was high and patient visits were plummeting. To ensure the safety of our community, we launched a custom, AI-powered chatbot to enable patients to book in-person appointments, schedule video visits and get answers to complex COVID-19 questions.

Through partnerships with the Los Angeles Lakers and Dodgers, we elevated the efforts of our front-line workers, drawing praise from celebrities such as LeBron James, Tom Hanks, Bryan Cranston and Kim Kardashian.

But this is not a story of celebrity. It's a story of community. It's a story of how UCLA Health created a digital doorway to welcome patients in a time of crisis and ensure they could get the care they needed for themselves and their families.

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#1 in California
gives you and your family the confidence you need.

As the global pandemic has shown us, we cannot take our health for granted. Where you go for healthcare matters.

Discover More

Hi there! Welcome to UCLA Health. I can help answer your questions and get you started.

SOLUTION

1 CREATE A PLACE WHERE CONVERSATIONS CAN HAPPEN.

UCLA Health positioned its chatbot to be a functional, welcoming, efficient and trusted source of truth -- providing answers, debunking myths and gifting peace of mind.

2 EMPOWER PEOPLE TO BOOK APPOINTMENTS AND VIDEO VISITS.

To truly understand how to best serve our community, we conducted a competitive audit of leading chatbots. We examined best practices within and outside of health care, to guide a HIPAA-compliant implementation that enabled patients to book appointments.

3 LEAD WITH SCIENCE.

With over 30,000 employees and globally renowned medical experts embedded across our team, UCLA Health was well-positioned to provide Southern Californians with the precise guidance needed to navigate the intricacies of COVID-19. In partnership with our infectious disease department, we stood up a Command Center, establishing structures and processes to perpetually update the chatbot to keep patients apprised of the latest developments. Through our unique status as California's leading academic medical center, Southern Californians could trust our chatbot as an evidence-based source of truth.

## 4 MAKE COMPLEX MEDICAL INFORMATION EASY TO UNDERSTAND.

Although the information we shared with chatbot users was provided by medical experts, in order to ensure life-saving tips could be accessible to all users, we enlisted copywriters to colloquialize much of the language, transforming medical jargon into easily understandable words. The net: our chatbot helped people feel safe, seen and understood. We strategically added emojis to humanize the interactions and offer reassurance. We crafted a decision tree to help patients easily find answers to questions.

5 FACILITATE VIDEO VISITS.

In a time when many patients feared returning to the hospital for even their annual checkups, we turned our chatbot into a powerful appointment-booking tool, making it easy for patients to book video visits and stay in touch with their doctor.

6 A/B TEST TO OPTIMIZE RELENTLESSLY.

To fuel chatbot conversions, we perpetually A/B tested features to see which approach would drive the most favorable patient response. We were curious to learn which chatbot avatar would perform best. We tested the efficacy of original illustrations vs. live-action photos. We also explored chatbot color, location on page, and the language we would employ to welcome users. Ultimately, we did not aim for or land on the flashiest approach. We let data decide and embraced the avatar that inspired patients to book appointments.
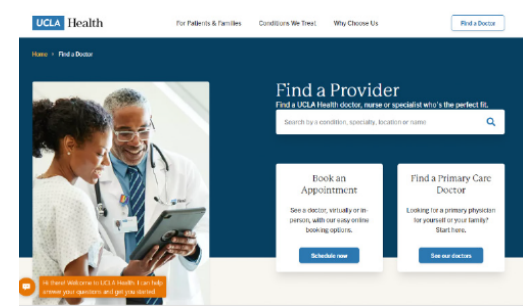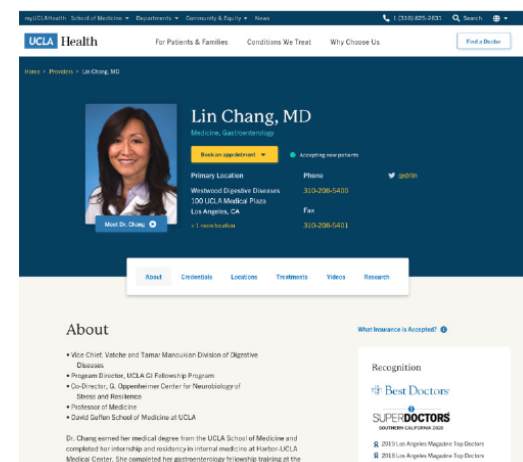
METRICS

In 2019, UCLA Health facilitated **400** video visits. In 2020, we grew the number to **400,000+**.

Over **one million** messages were sent back and forth on the UCLA Health chatbot.

The UCLA Health chatbot was responsible for driving **30%** of all new patient forms across our enterprise.

Our marketing efforts drove over **800 million** media impressions, lifting our visibility and reputation across Southern California.

The UCLA Health chatbot helped Southern Californians get answers to **tens of thousands** of questions about COVID-19 testing and vaccines.

With Los Angeles at the epicenter of the U.S. COVID-19 pandemic, UCLA Health turned its chatbot into a vital, life-saving tool. The UCLA Health chatbot became and remains a crucial access point, helping us to connect with and offer support to Southern Californians. The impact of our reach has been felt across our entire health care system. We continue to update our answers through a triage process: when a new question surfaces, we send it to a panel of experts to respond and formalize an evidence-based answer. Then, our writers colloquialize the language to make it as accessible and empathetic as possible before feeding it back into our chatbot. The whole process is often completed in less than 1 hour.

UCLA Health