CitiusTech

Why UX writing is the missing piece in healthcare communication

Designing communication best suited for healthcare in the digital age

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Key Insights

- Nearly half of the communication-related malpractice claims arise either from provider-patient or provider-provider miscommunication.

- By 2060, nearly 25% of the U.S. population will be aged 65 or above. This enhances the need for simplified healthcare UX to ensure inclusive and accessible care.

- As patients and professionals increasingly engage with digital interfaces, designing communications with the user experience (UX) in mind can create drastic impacts on the way care is delivered.
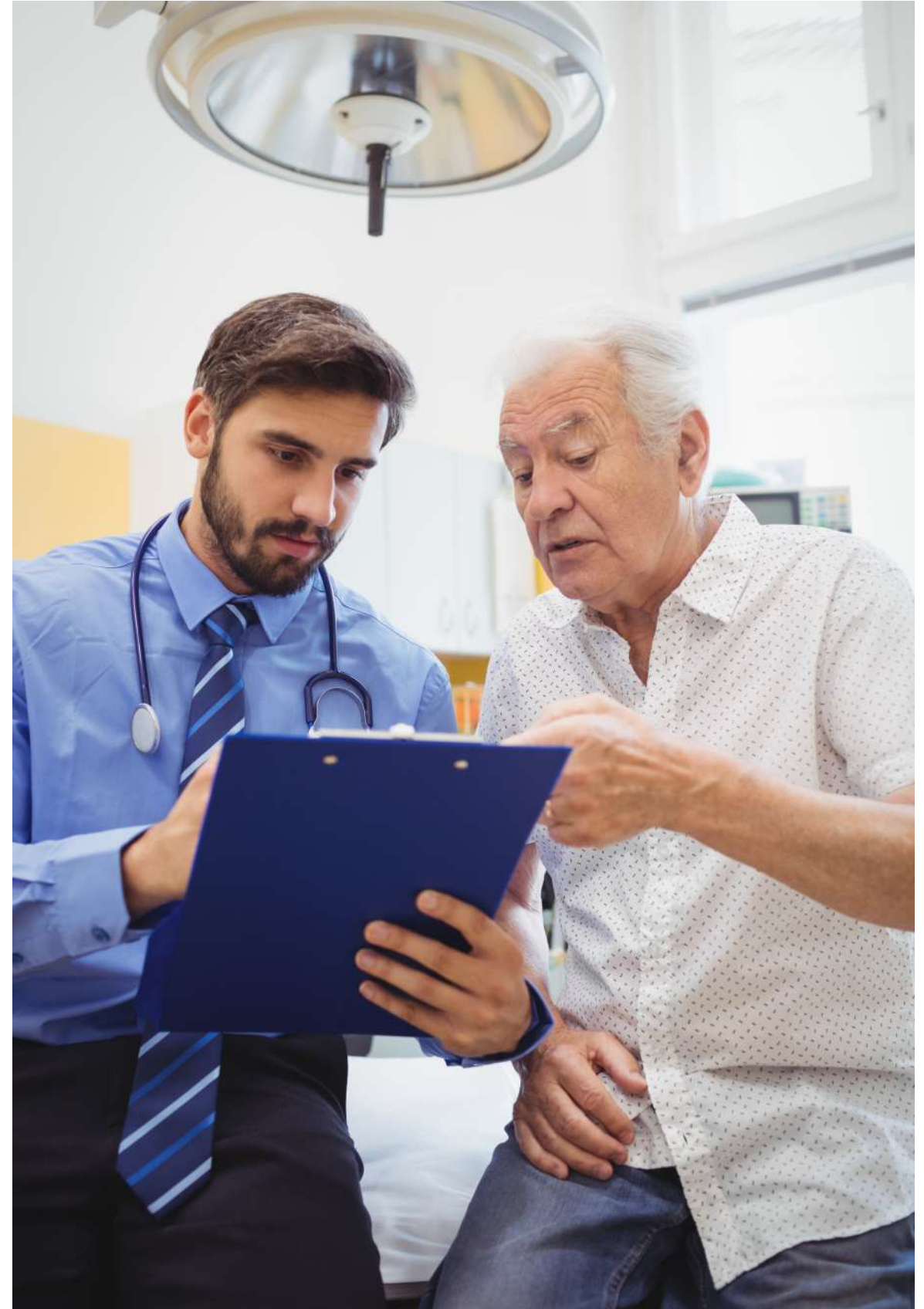
Delivering wellness with words

Today, healthcare is beyond the mere provision of medical treatment; it is the delivery of personalized and empathetic care. As an industry, healthcare is increasingly adopting an outcome-driven, multimodality care approach that includes self-management, digital therapeutics, and social wellness. Hence, in this ecosystem, superior user experience (UX) is paramount for enhancing patient engagement, optimizing operational efficiency, and ultimately improving overall healthcare outcomes.

A key component in delivering such an experience is impactful communication, as patients and healthcare professionals engage with industry touchpoints in umpteen ways. A gap in communication effectiveness can hinder the seamless flow of information, potentially impeding the collaborative efforts between patients, healthcare providers, and payers. For instance, [53%](#) of malpractice claims citing communication failures arise from provider–patient miscommunication, while 47% result from provider–provider miscommunication.

That is where **Communication Design** comes into the picture. By embracing this holistic approach to healthcare, care providers and payers can create a visually appealing platform that communicates the virtues of a solution or product to a potential user, thereby addressing the challenge of communicating effectively in the patient's language, facilitating informed decision-making during their care, claims, or purchase journeys, and engaging users to drive positive outcomes.

Robust communication designed with cultural and emotional nuances in mind can elevate patient journeys in unforeseen ways:

Problem	Solution
50% of US adults cannot read above eighth-grade level. *How can healthcare be comprehensible for the lowest reading grade levels?*	Simplification of messages with the lowest reading grade in mind.
Healthcare caters to professionals fluent in technical terminologies and patients who are not. *How can differences in technical proficiency be addressed?*	Customization of communication as per the user to prevent alienation among patients while appealing to professionals.
Use cases overlooking communication design impede desired outcomes among patients and professionals. *How can user-based outcomes be achieved successfully?*	Encouraging patients to adhere to their care plans and other instructions while professionals experience minimized miscommunication, improved compliance, and so on.

With a [burgeoning](#) market and an increasingly digitized healthcare value chain, it is essential to say the right thing in the right manner. Wordplay can quickly transform from a game to a game-changer. End users (patients and their attendees) want personalized, consistent, and holistic UX which relies on the foundation of tailored, user-centric communication.

Therefore, employing a holistic approach to UX writing can help provide improved healthcare experiences.

Users often come across information appearing on mobile or device interfaces while navigating digital products or services. UX writing is the practice of crafting such 'copies,' where the information is meticulously curated to cater to the user's needs, preferences, context of use, and type of application.

Impactful writing depends on three elements: who the end user is, why they require the information, and what action they intend to take after interacting with it.

Moreover, selecting the ideal vocabulary, presentation formats, and structure can help deliver information in the best way possible.

Why is UX writing significant in communication design?

Every product or service communication aims to forge a relationship with the user and humanize the brand. UX writing plays a pivotal role in shaping the digital interface's overall experience, ensuring smooth task completion. In healthcare, UX writing involves simplifying appointment scheduling, timely patient follow-ups, and easily accessible reports, among others. The four pillars mentioned below are critical to better engagement and improved conversion rates:
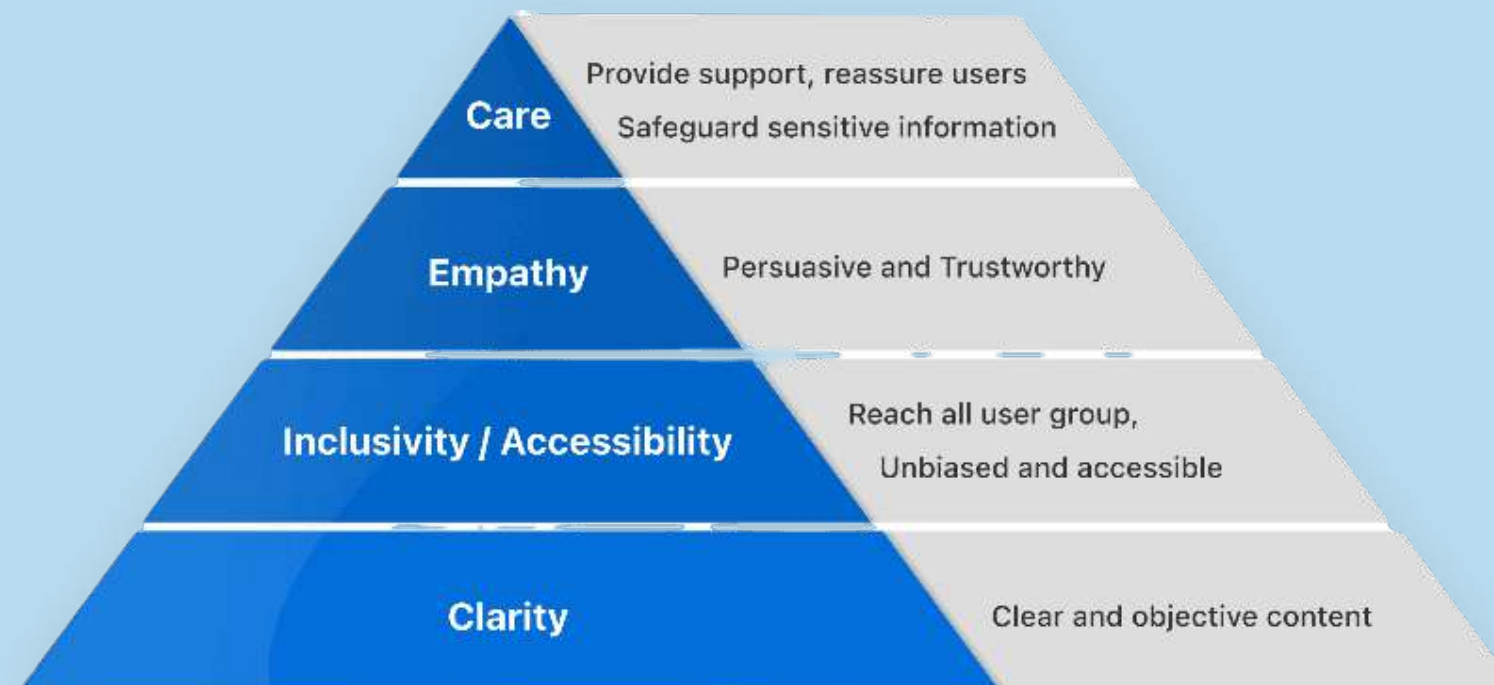

Care	Provide support, reassure users Safeguard sensitive information
Empathy	Persuasive and Trustworthy
Inclusivity / Accessibility	Reach all user group, Unbiased and accessible
Clarity	Clear and objective content

Fig 1. Four pillars of UX writing for better engagement

1. Clarity

It serves as the starting point for any UX communication. In order to design an effective UX, it is essential to have an in-depth understanding of the overarching strategy and objectives of the content to convey the key message. It is also important to recognize that a one-size-fits-all approach is not viable as users, businesses, and technical considerations vary with each project. Thus, writers must clearly understand the context and the users for whom the content is crafted.

2. Inclusivity/accessibility

Communication design should cater to all users, acknowledging their present and future needs. The content created must ensure accessibility for both regular and differently-abled users. Similarly, UX writers should give precedence to inclusivity by taking into account the racial, gender, and cultural diversity of the target audience while crafting copy. This approach minimizes usability issues and fosters an equitable digital environment.

For instance, some users may 'read' copy, while others rely on screen readers and other assistive technologies. Therefore, interactive interface elements, like icons and buttons, must be easily accessible to such assistive tools.

3. Empathy

It is the foundation of healthcare and must reflect across all touchpoints. In real life, different users face diverse challenges. The digital content must harmonize with each of the user contexts.

Empathetic UX writing is critical to enable human-centricity in healthcare. This is because users are often in a state of both physical and emotional vulnerability. Through engagement with users during user research and usability testing, product owners or patient experience managers can acquire a deeper understanding of their emotions, goals, and challenges, among other intricacies, to craft the best UX.

4. Care

This marks the successful culmination of the preceding steps. Clear, inclusive, and empathetic communication effectively conveys care to end users. Care extends beyond empathy in healthcare, and UX designers must acknowledge the user's concerns while supporting and reassuring them.

Healthcare product owners or patient experience managers must emphasize patient safety and assist professionals in delivering quality care by providing necessary safeguards, for instance, accurate dosage and allergy information, among others. Most importantly, the final UX copies must comply with established healthcare regulations.
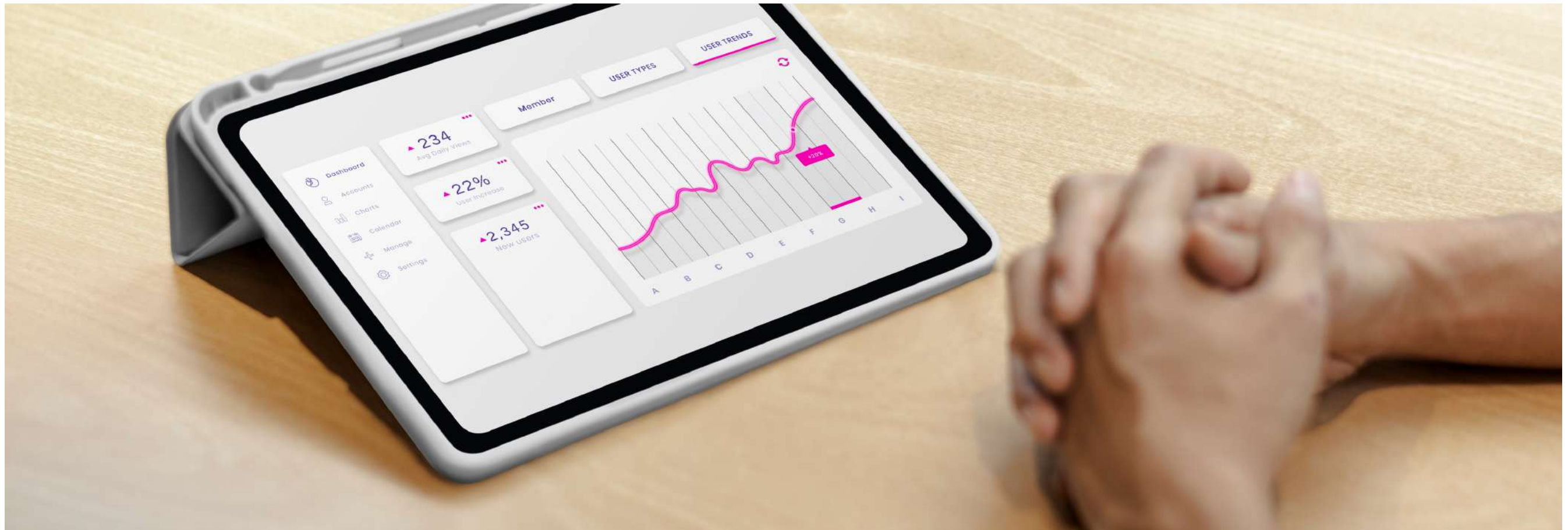
Designing touchpoints with effective UX writing for greater impact

Each customer–facing touchpoint must be crafted to communicate easily and effectively. Utilizing effective UX writing can enhance the outcome of this process.

CTA (Call to action) button

The most important element in a user interface's design – a CTA button informs a user about the primary and specific action after it has been clicked. Therefore, a short and crisp CTA copy is key to capturing users' attention and conveying a sense of urgency to encourage engagement in action. An essential aspect of impactful CTA copy is to use a leading or action–oriented verb, and must contain the right compelling details.
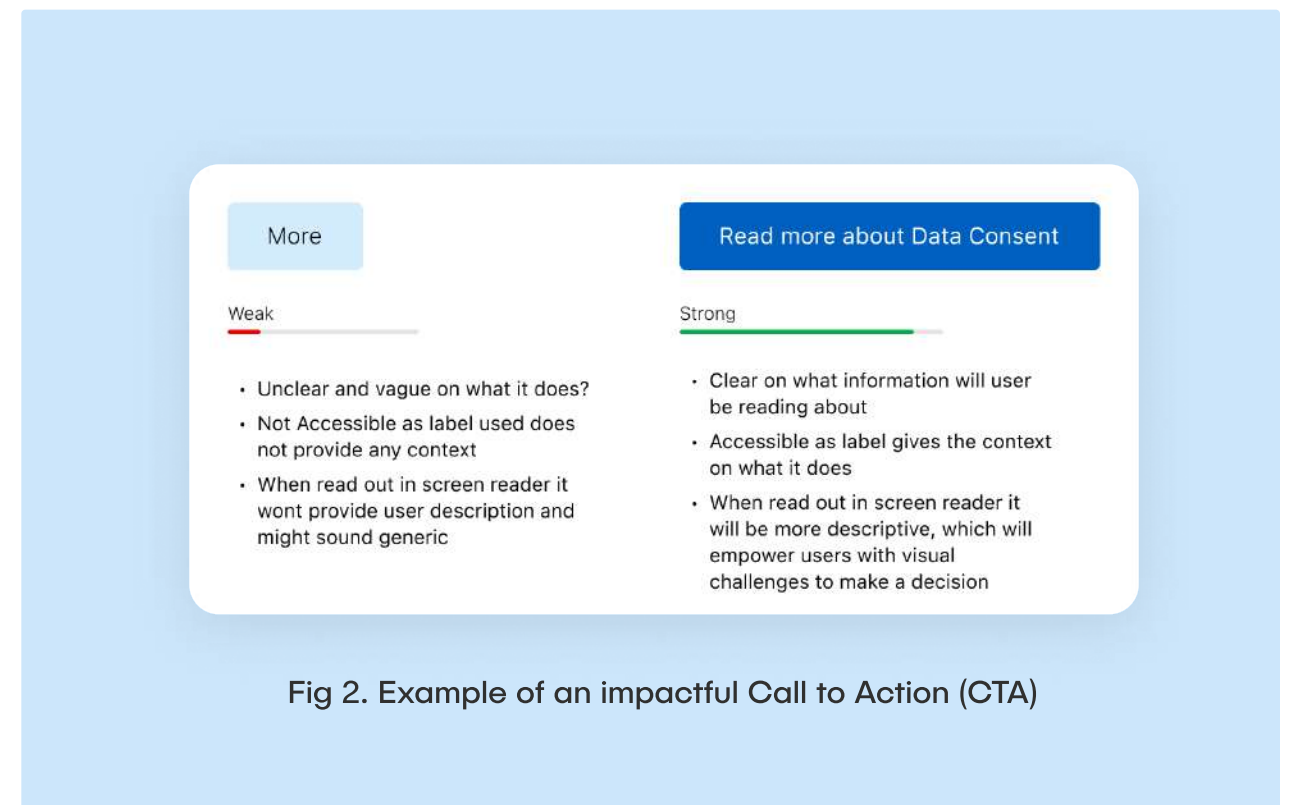

Fig 2. Example of an impactful Call to Action (CTA)

Perspective from CitiusTech engagements

While working for a provider portal, we discovered that using a leading verb in CTAs not only made them more compelling for our users but also ensured accessibility for visually impaired users. Screen reader users found greater clarity on the action associated with a CTA when a leading verb was used, compared to CTAs with a noun.

Headlines and subheading

The first UX element that a user interacts with on a page is an eye-grabbing headline. Conversely, it is the first piece of information consumed by the user, and therefore UX designers must adopt a tone that resonates with the user and lends authenticity, relevance, and conciseness.

Serving as extensions of headlines, subheadings elaborate on the headlines – a single headline cannot express a message in its entirety. Moreover, they enable quicker scanning of the content, allowing users to focus on specific sections that interest them. Meaningful headings and subheadings can motivate users to engage in three ways – what action they can take, what action they have performed, and the choice of navigating back. To exemplify, the app interface for providers below displays terminologies that resonate with their professional expertise and technical vocabulary.

Primary message

Headlines and subheadings require a 'supporting structure' to strengthen the delivery of their message. A body copy is pivotal in reinforcing and expanding the brand message. When presented as short paragraphs or sentences, body copy helps improve readability and legibility.

Neglecting this crucial UX requirement can lead to mental and cognitive strain on users, which results in them skipping or losing interest in the content.

Perspective from CitiusTech engagements

While designing an application for an integrated healthcare platform, we observed that users bypassed the signup after implementing these changes, users showed an process and accessed the directory despite the data available being limited.

To encourage user registration, we introduced a comprehensive list of services that would become available upon signing up, complemented by strategic visuals. Subsequent research indicated that after implementing these changes, users showed an increased inclination toward signing up to access all the available features.

Onboarding screens

An onboarding screen functions as an introduction to an application – it provides a brand with the opportunity to create a strong first impression and set the appropriate context among users even before they begin using a product or service. As this initial interaction is a crucial touchpoint for user conversion, it is vital to create a
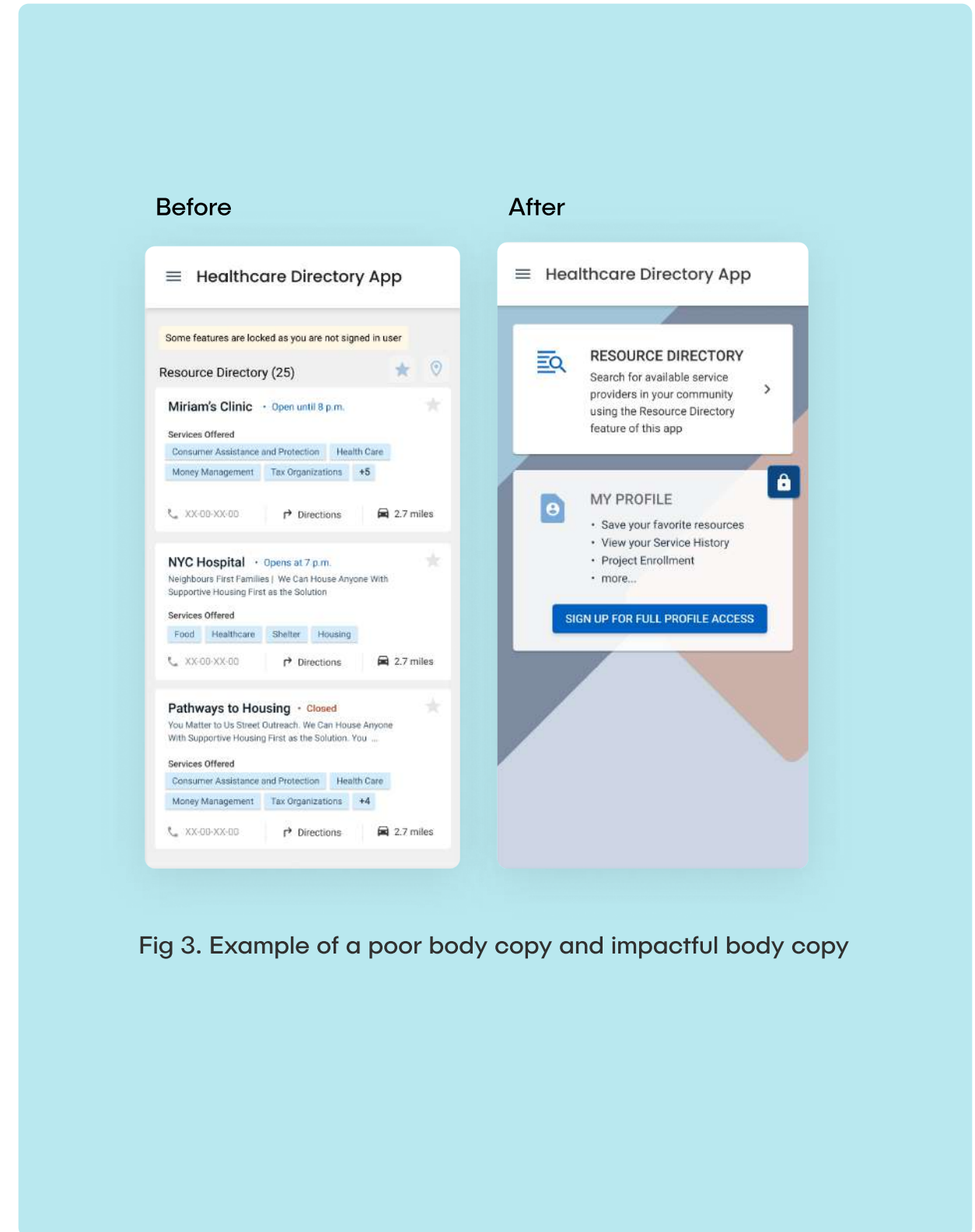

Before   After

Fig 3. Example of a poor body copy and impactful body copy

well-crafted copy that elucidates the supporting visual elements. Along with being clear and instructive, the copy must also be minimalistic. It must focus on the key tasks that a user may require assistance with while navigating the interface and offer a concise overview of what they can expect from the product or service and the benefits it provides.

Tooltips and captions

Additional information and context can enhance accessibility for users, especially those using screen readers. The inclusion of tooltips and captions facilitates this. Studies have demonstrated that the incorporation of crisp tooltips or captions – particularly when users
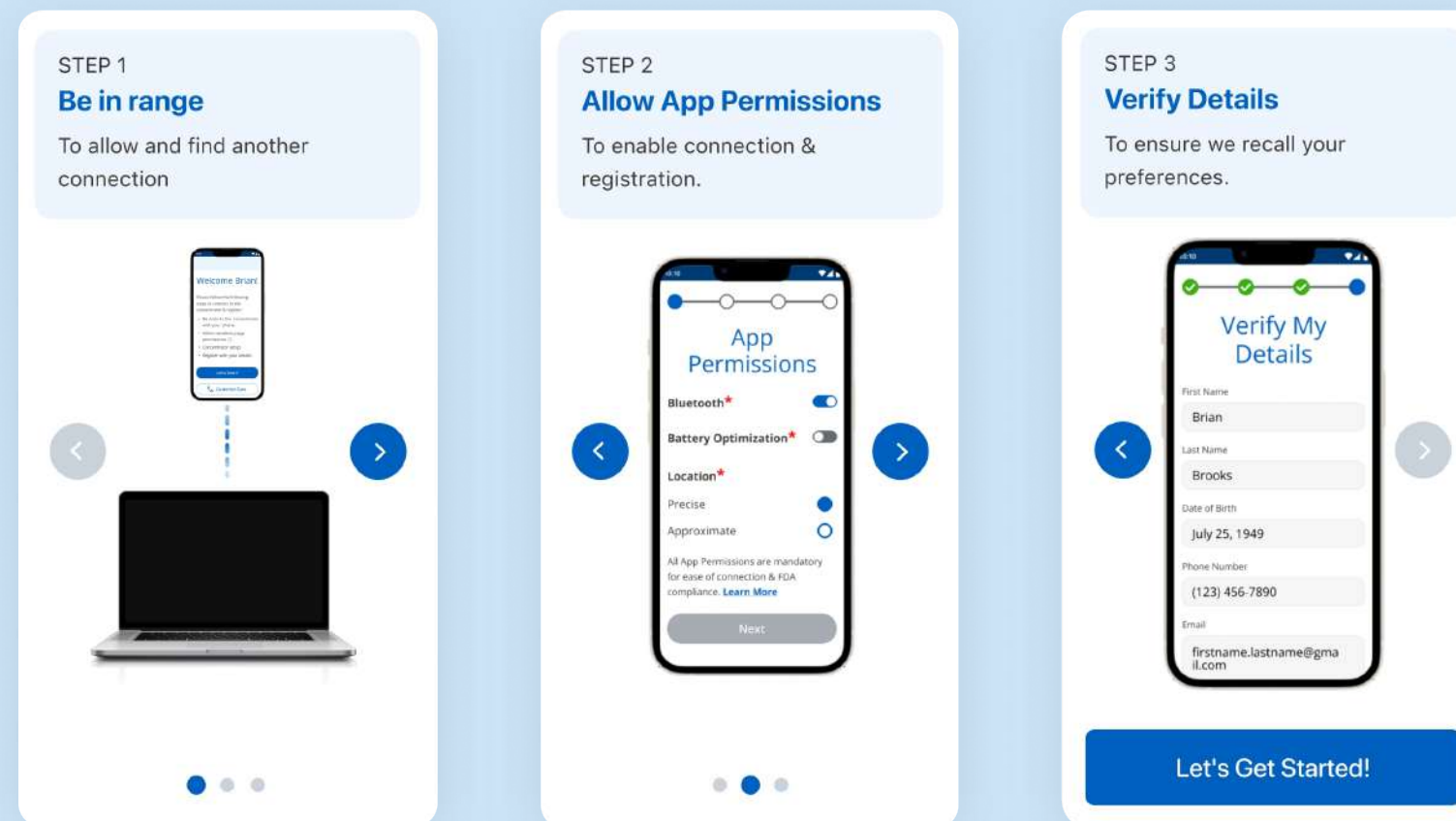

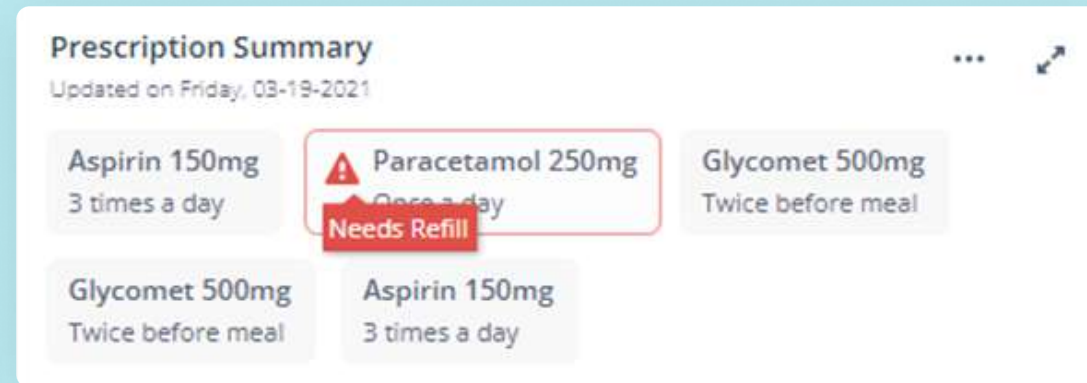Fig 4. Example of engaging onboarding screens

Fig 5. Example of powerful caption

navigate applications with numerous images and UI elements – can enhance usability and accessibility. Such copy is effective when it is instructive and below 150 characters in length. Thus, a balance between brevity and informativeness must be achieved.

Perspective from CitiusTech engagements

The medication section of a patient portal app can highlight the importance of tooltips or captions in supporting the visual UI. Delivering critical information should be done with utmost sensitivity and care. As shown in the Fig 5. above, the interface helps patients easily view and understand medicine names, dosages, and refilling requirements.

Error Messages

It is vital to inspire user action, but equally crucial to promptly inform them about action failure or non-completion through error messages. UX writers must be sensitive to patients' distress, prioritizing clarity and helpfulness while creating copies. Such messages should enable users to understand the issue and quickly decide on their next steps.

Maintaining a polite and friendly tone and infusing humor wherever appropriate is essential to instill calmness. Users will feel assured of a simple resolution, leading to enhanced product or service UX.

Notifications

Every product or service user should receive real-time reminders, alerts, upcoming upgrades, activities, and pending actions. Delivering concise and compelling notifications across web and mobile interfaces ensures user engagement on the platform. Studies indicate that notifications below 25 characters in length outperform longer copies. Additionally, maintaining consistency with a brand's voice is crucial as the messaging tone significantly influences the user's perception of the product and, consequently, the brand.

Menus

Aesthetically designed menus are a must to create more intuitive and user-friendly digital interfaces. Copy elements must be customized as per the menu type. Usually, the text in a menu contains a single word corresponding to an action. Additionally, menus can also act as introductions to categorized content and different sections of the layout.
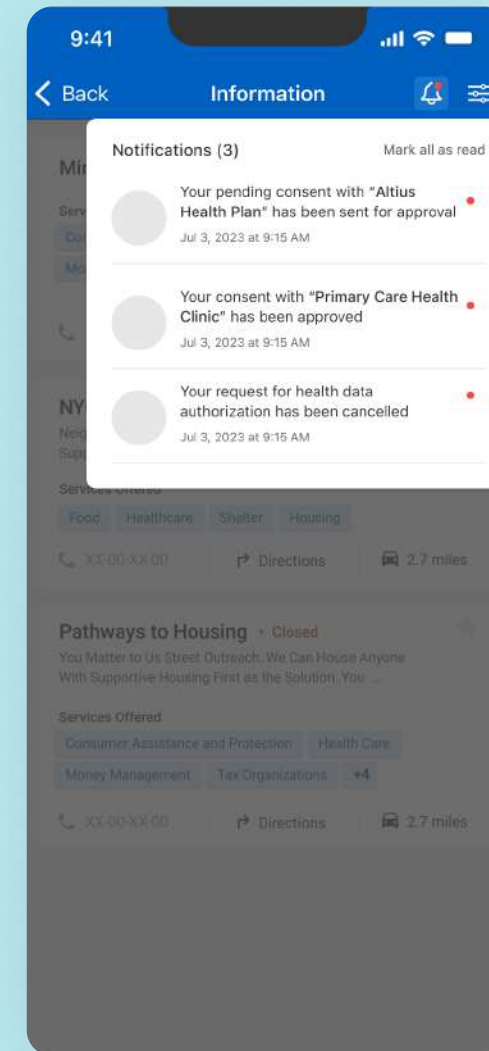

Fig 6. Example of clear and concise notifications

Here, the copy consists of nouns to mark the destinations that users can explore. The choice of menu type and its accompanying copy should align with the target audience's expectations and preferences.

How to up your game in UX writing?

The 4 pillars of UX writing provide a sound basis for the crafting of impactful communication. At the same time, there are factors that must be considered while creating content for this purpose.

User centricity

Assess the users' informational needs and contexts in which they may require it. But refrain from overwhelming them with information that is not immediately needed. Furthermore, product owners or patient experience managers must identify users' emotional states to determine whether to celebrate accomplishments, offer empathetic guidance, or address concerns. Craft copies that align with the users' real-time needs and their genders, and utilize powerful verbs that elicit action.

In a similar pattern observed during user research, patients expressed discomfort and intimidation due to sensitive data or social stigma when providing details. Providing the right amount of information & guidance progressively at every step helped break down the process, set clear expectations, and outline specific user benefits for each information request.

Specificity

Tailor UX writing to suit the specific needs of the target audience, considering different user types. When catering to patients, it's crucial to avoid complex medical terms and professional jargon. A neutral, positive, and conversational tone humanizes interactions, offering comfort to patients and their families. For healthcare professionals, product owners or patient experience managers should adopt a 'specialist over generalist' approach and utilize technical language they are familiar with. Here, writers must prioritize clarity in user segmentation and communication rather than just the presentation.

Perspective from CitiusTech engagements

Our recent user research conducted for an application designed for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) patients initially revealed that users felt stress and fear upon diagnosis. On the other hand, they had the determination and perseverance to manage the condition. The user research also divulged that the app users had apprehensions regarding the shared data with the platform. A well-crafted explanation of the information request reassured them. Hence, avoiding technical language in favor of a more conversational and friendly approach, makes the process more comfortable and approachable, steering away from technical OS-generated messages.
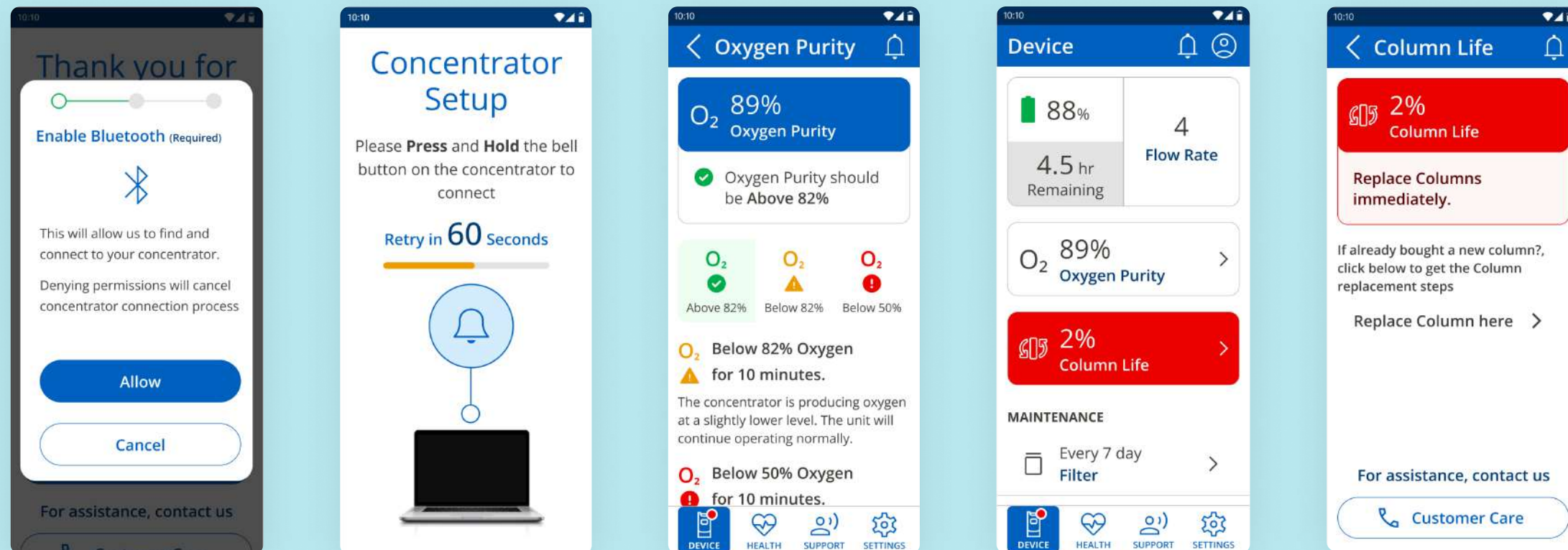

Fig 7. Sample screens of an application designed for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) patients

Consistency

Ensure uniformity in language and terminology used across copies, especially when a brand offers similar or complementary services on multiple platforms. Consistency is vital; for instance, if one platform uses 'Learn more' as a CTA copy, it shouldn't interchange with 'Explore' on another platform. Such measures help reduce ambiguity, minimize misinterpretation, and ensure a seamless user experience.

Perspective from CitiusTech engagements

While developing a COPD app, there was a significant user drop-off rate detected during the app download and installation process, with users failing to proceed to pair the medical device. Interviews with existing users revealed their unfamiliarity with accessory names and product-specific terminologies, resulting in frustration and app abandonment. Testing design concepts with carefully considered terms and nomenclature elicited positive user reactions, indicating an improved onboarding experience and increased user acceptance.

Balance

Maintain balance in the content of the copy created – in both presentation style and substance. A visually appealing copy may garner a user's attention. However, if it is devoid of meaning and lacks purpose, it will not be impactful. Similarly, a copy containing valuable data and information will be ineffectual if it is poorly presented. Therefore, achieving an equilibrium between quality textual content and aesthetics can enhance the overall usability of UX copies.

Quality assurance

Ensure that the copy created meets the accepted quality standards before being integrated into a product or service – it must be effective, coherent, and without grammatical errors and misspellings. A quality assurance mechanism that can be employed is the four-eyes-principle. Here, at least two parties in the collaborating teams must validate the quality of the final copy before its implementation.

Making UX writing the cornerstone of communication in healthcare

The digital healthcare solution cycle must begin with UX writing. Why? Because it is an integral part of the product development process and helps eliminate several challenges associated with communication design.

Adopting a UX-writing-first approach during product development serves as a vital bridge between design and content teams, fostering improved collaboration. UX leads can ensure an elevated focus on the usability, functionality, and accessibility of the final product or service copies. The product owners or patient experience managers can also leverage the methodology to simplify content strategy development and offer insights into critical aspects of content dissemination. Insights include but are not limited to communication channels, UX design, and best

practices to deliver satisfactory UX, aiding in creating a unified vision for UX content.

As established in this paper, transparent, inclusive, and empathetic communication can elevate UX for patients and healthcare providers alike. Implementing targeted UX writing for these audiences yields numerous benefits, including improved patient satisfaction, increased patient retention, enhanced patient engagement, and better regulatory compliance. This ultimately results in low user drop-off rates, reduced customer support calls, positive social feedback, and growth. Therefore, making UX the cornerstone of communication in healthcare is imperative for the industry's progress.

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