



Mike Garnham, health intelligence analyst / information manager, explains how simple text messages are helping to bring down the rate of missed appointments.

There are many different reasons for people missing appointments, but sometimes it's simply because people just forget. However, it's an expensive mistake to make – the cost of a missed medical appointment is, on average, about £160.

It's not just a financial cost either – time is wasted when people miss appointments. Clinicians were frequently saying that they wanted to get patients to see a consultant as soon as possible to avoid a crisis. Missed appointments waste crucial time with consultants who could have scheduled someone else in for essential care and treatment.

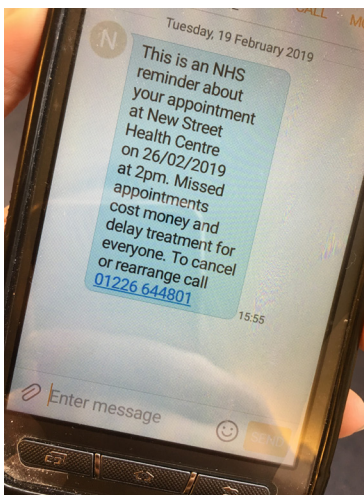
Also, because of the nature of some of the care we provide, it might be that our teams will see someone regularly for a few weeks, then their follow up appointment won't be for another six months. This can make it difficult for people to keep track of their appointments.

It made complete clinical and financial sense to do something to improve this, so in 2016 we procured a system to send out appointment reminders by text. When a service user is due to attend an appointment, they are sent a reminder one week and then 24 hours hours before their appointment via text message.

To date, almost 54,000 appointment communication messages have been sent with a 92% delivery success rate – typically this is between 200 – 300 messages per day. Since the launch of the system, 'did not attend' rates in teams that use the system have been reduced by approximately 33%.

Having the system in place is also a way of moving the organisation forward with modern ways of working. You get a text message reminder for everything these days – your GP appointments, your dentist appointments, and even your hair appointments. It's a normal way of communicating with someone to remind them of the importance of attending their appointments to save the NHS money and time.

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What makes this reminder service different is a message can also be sent to a parent/guardian or carer, and the message can be 'tailored' to a patient group – for example having an easy read message for people with cognitive impairment or learning disabilities.

The reminder service is also not limited to text messaging. We can send a voice message or have an agent call someone if they don't have a mobile telephone number. Because the system is so easy to use and adaptable, 'did not attend' rates in core teams have reduced to just 13% in some areas.



In a nutshell

People forgetting to attend their appointments costs the NHS time and money. By sending people a quick reminder by text message, we've seen the number of people not attending their appointments go down.