



Using social influence to reduce DNA rates in healthcare settings

A practical guide

THE PROBLEM WITH DID NOT ATTENDS (DNAs)

Patients who Do Not Attend (DNA) their appointments and fail to cancel with enough time to offer it to another patient are a major drain on NHS resources. Around 6 million appointments are wasted each year at an estimated direct cost of £700 - 800 million.

84% of General Practitioners cite DNAs as a problem leading to lengthened waiting times, difficulty in reaching performance targets, reduced patient satisfaction, greater costs and potential public health issues.

As GPs prepare to commission services, persuading patients to take greater responsibility for their health and to use services appropriately are factors likely to rise in importance.

In this practical guide we demonstrate how simple changes informed by behavioural science research can improve patient engagement and commitment and result in a significant reduction in DNA rates. Specifically we provide three practical actions that Healthcare Professionals can immediately take to reduce Did Not Attend (DNA) rates.



A practical guide to reducing DNA rates in healthcare settings

Involve patients actively in the appointment making process

People generally prefer to live up to their commitments, especially those that are owned and require their active rather than passive involvement. Social psychologist Robert Cialdini cites the example of Chicago restaurateur Gordon Sinclair who asked his staff to make one small change when taking reservations over the phone. Rather than asking customers to “*please call us if you need to change or cancel your booking*” staff were instructed to say, “*Would you be willing to call us if you have to change or cancel your booking?*” and then pause and wait for the customer to answer ‘Yes’. This small change led to a notable drop in no-shows.

When seeking to reduce DNAs GP surgeries are advised to more actively involve patients in the appointment making process by:

Asking patients if they would be willing to call if they have to cancel before pausing to allow them to respond ‘Yes’

Asking patients to verbally repeat back the time and date of their appointment whilst on the phone. (In our study this intervention alone led to 6.7% reduction in DNAs.

Get commitments in writing

Most people know that if they have a task they need to carry out then if they write it down they are more likely to remember that task and carry it out. In fact some studies have shown that the likelihood of carrying out a specific task or achieving a particular goal can increase 3 -or even 4-fold if a person commits their task or goal to paper.

DNAs can be reduced by asking patients to write down a reminder of their appointment.

Asking patients to write down a unique number that identifies a specific appointment can lead to reduces DNAs

Does your surgery use appointment cards? If so who writes the appointment details on the card? Asking patients to do it themselves rather than a nurse or receptionist doing it for them reduced DNAs by 18% in our studies.

Publicise the right norm

Messages displayed on waiting room walls that decry high rates of DNAs are problematic for two reasons.

1. They can often lead to an increase in DNAs because they send a message ‘*look at all the people who aren’t turning up!*’
2. The people who don’t turn up never see them so they are targeting the wrong patients.

Instead highlight the much larger number of patients who do turn up on time for their appointment. When we tested this idea in addition to the others described we reduced DNAs by 30%

