

WHO MISS CLINIC APPOINTMENTS AND WHY?

Zailinawati AH, Ng CJ, Nik-Sherina H. Why do patients with chronic illnesses fail to keep their appointments? A telephone interview. *Asia Pac J Public Health*. 2006;18(1):10-5 [PubMed]

Chronic illnesses are common reasons for encounters in primary care clinic. It requires regular follow-up to monitor disease control and to detect early complications. However, many patients do not adhere to their appointments; this potentially affects their health and reduces the efficiency of the appointment system. A telephone interview survey was conducted in a hospital-based family practice clinic in Kuala Lumpur to identify the reasons of default and the associated factors. The study revealed that 16.7% of the patients failed to turn up for their appointments. Out of 671 patients, 67% were successfully interviewed. Factors associated with default were male gender, Indian ethnicity, patients with coronary artery disease, patients having more than four chronic diseases, and shorter appointment intervals. The main reasons for non-attendance were: forgot the appointment dates (32.9%), not feeling well (12.3%), administrative errors (19.1%) and work or family commitments (8.2%). The majority preferred a reminder through telephone (71.4%) and letters (41.3%). Further studies would be useful to see if reminders reduce the non-attendance rate.

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SMS REMINDER IS MORE COST EFFECTIVE THAN TELEPHONE REMINDER IN REDUCING NON-ATTENDANCE

Leong KC, Chen WS, Leong KW, Mastura I, Mimi O, Sheikh Mohd Amin, Zailinawati AH, Ng CJ, Phua KL, Teng CL. The use of text messaging to improve attendance in primary care: a randomized controlled trial. *Fam Pract*. 2006; doi: 10.1093/fampra/cml044 [PubMed]

Non-attendance is common in primary care (see abstract by Zailinawati). The main reasons for non-attendance were forgetfulness, practice error and a mix-up over dates and times—all of which are remediable through appropriate reminder services. In this multicentre three-arm randomised controlled trial done in seven primary care clinics in Malaysia, there were two intervention arms consisting of text messaging (SMS) and mobile phone reminders given 24–48 hours prior to scheduled appointments. Control group did not receive any intervention. A total of 993 participants were eligible for analysis. Attendance rates of control, text messaging and mobile phone reminder groups were 48.1%, 59.0% and 59.6%, respectively. The cost of text messaging reminder (RM 0.45 per attendance) was lower than mobile phone reminder (RM 0.82 per attendance). The authors concluded that text messaging reminder system was effective in improving attendance rate in Malaysian primary care and it was more cost-effective compared with the mobile phone reminder. The publication of this randomised controlled trial in a high impact international journal is the result of collaboration between university academics, and primary care practitioners in public and private primary care clinics.

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Editor's note: Is SMS ready to be used to improve the attendance rate of patients in the Malaysian healthcare system? Let us hear your views!