

Appointment Cancellations on the Rise



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With many practices adopting self-scheduling, appointment cancellations have increased. This outcome is no surprise, as self-scheduling platforms allow 24/7 access to book – or cancel and rebook – appointments. This access increases consumers' ability to schedule by nearly 400% over traditional business hours.

Appointment cancellations need not be a thorn in your side; however, they must be proactively managed. Try one – or more – of these strategies:

Make it easy to cancel. If a patient does not intend to keep their appointment, it's much better for them to cancel. If a patient no-shows, instead of cancelling, the practice loses the availability to reassign the slot; a cancellation gives you a shot. For appointments that are booked far in advance, consider sending appointment reminders several weeks in advance. Place any newly opened slots back in the queue to schedule.

Maintain a waitlist. Keep a list of patients waiting to get an appointment, ideally moving them up through an automated waitlist to your scheduling system. Consider opting all *new*

patients into the waitlist for the patients who desire an earlier appointment should one become available. This is now the standard procedure many practices. Most automated systems allow you to offer slots to a batch of patients, so the choice becomes the patients.

Keep a list of patients who are due. Query for patients who may benefit from a preventive visit – or other medically-necessary encounter. Use cancelled slots for patients who are due for annual wellness visits, for example.

Offer alternatives. Consider offering telemedicine appointments for patients who may cancel due to transportation or childcare. For last-minute cancellations, slots may be filled with telemedicine encounters if there is no time to commute for an in-person visit.

Finally, take the opportunity to turn the mirror on your practice. Are you unknowingly contributing to the problem? Review your scheduling horizon to determine if patients are forgetting their appointments, because you're offering appointments too far in the future. Determine your policies for cancelling clinics, making sure that providers are scheduling off with sufficient notice. Evaluate your workstream related to insurance eligibility, referrals, and prior authorizations to avoid rescheduling patients for administrative issues.

A myriad opportunities exist for us to improve “internal” cancellations. Appointment cancellations are undeniably escalating, however effective management can prevent the problems that often follow.

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