
It's Due Time: Patient Self-Scheduling

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Blame OpenTable®, Uber®, or ATMs, but the world of self-service is knocking on physicians' door as patients desire self-service tools. Patient self-scheduling solutions need not encumber your practice; in fact, they can be an excellent way to reduce a burden on your already-overworked administrative staff. In addition to freeing up some staff time, self-scheduling can benefit your practice by:

- Allowing cancelled slots to convert to arrivals; for example, on Tuesday morning, Ms. Smith cancels her long-scheduled Friday morning appointment, while Mr. Jones self-schedules in that now-available slot on Wednesday. That appointment slot may have otherwise gone unfilled.
- Reducing no-shows, as patients are in charge of their appointment – and can better reference their personal calendars when choosing the right date and time.
- Permitting access to the functionality 24/7 and (typically) via a mobile device, allowing working professionals a better shot at obtaining an appointment – perhaps encouraging a younger, more commercially insured patient population to access your practice.
- Integrating appointment confirmations, allowing patients to have documentation of their appointment date and time, and, if applicable, providing a convenient link to your location to improve patients' timeliness of arrival.
- Engaging patients in other self-service tools that could improve your efficiency, such as notification of normal test results.

While there is fear of the unknown, there's no reason you have to convert your entire appointment schedule to a self-service option. Look for a solution that puts you in charge of managing this offering, which can be limited to only certain time slots (for example, in the afternoon), as well as particular types of patients (for example, exclusively established patients – or only a cohort of patients, such as those seeking a flu shot). Many products offer integrated, rules-based decision trees to ensure that the “wrong” patient doesn't end up in the “wrong” slot – and remember that you can still monitor the schedule just as you

do today with the current phone-based model.

Just as many in the industry transitioned to automated phone and text-based reminders in the past several years, medical practices are recognizing the value of patients self-scheduling. 2019 is the year of digital transformation for medical practices. Self-scheduling solutions are readily available; take the opportunity to determine if this is a solution that could meet the needs of your patients – and your practice.

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