

HEDIS “No-Show” Strategies



Patients who fail appointments in primary care often use emergency departments as sources of both primary and chronic care, driving up costs and straining hospital systems. Above all else, missed appointments compromise continuity and quality of care for both the patients who no-show and others who would have been scheduled in those appointment slots.

Consider using some of the following strategies, taken from relevant literature, to reduce your no-show rate and to maximize appointment access and practice productivity.

- Analyze the types of visits for which patients are not keeping their appointments. Some practices find that re-check visits have the highest rates of no shows. If patients don't see the value in the follow-up visit, they are less likely to keep the appointment.
- Re-examine the practice's return visit patterns. Consider what is really necessary for the management of the patient, rather than "the usual" return visit interval. When medically appropriate, extending intervals for return appointments adds supply to the system because fewer future appointment slots are filled. Eliminate unnecessary appointments or find alternative ways to check in with patients, such as phone follow-ups, or portal messaging. Consider scheduling re-check appointments with a nurse rather than provider.
- Make patient convenience a priority when scheduling appointments. Start by asking patients when they would like to come in, rather than assigning them the first available slot. A study from the University of Missouri showed this controls as much as one-third of the probability of patients showing up.
- Evaluate your practice management system to see if it can supplement or automate any tracking or patient reminder tools you're currently using.
- A study by the Robert Wood Johnson University Medical Group showed that 23.1% of patients who received no appointment reminder missed their appointments. The number of no-shows decreased to 17.3% when patients were sent an appointment reminder. Send appointment reminders using every method available. Ask all patients for primary and secondary contact information at each visit.
- Encouraging patients to either confirm or reschedule within a specific time frame gives them both a reminder and an opportunity to reschedule if the current time is no longer convenient. Reminders to confirm or cancel can be sent 24–48 hours before the appointment, and lets them become actively involved in the *health care* process. It also increases the likelihood that they will follow through with their visit.
- Ask chronic no-show patients if they need support to keep the next appointment: “We really need you to come back, is this something you can make work?” or “Is there anything we can do to help you keep this next appointment?”
- Help chronic no-show patients understand the effect of no-shows on the practice: “If you are running late, or need to cancel or reschedule, please remember to call us and we can help you re-book your appointment. We use the cancellation slots to fit in other patients who need immediate care.”
- Schedule repeat offenders during a time that has less of an effect to the overall schedule. Only double-book chronic no-shows. Or, conduct “walk-in” hours at various times/days and use these slots primarily for the habitual no-show patients.
- Contact your patients to reschedule their missed appointments.
- Consider providing a separate telephone line with voicemail just for cancellations, and check it frequently. Act quickly on the cancellation messages to schedule patients on the waiting list.
- Available messaging applications and programs can immediately alert patients on the waitlist of a vacancy via text or email, and can also be used for appointment reminders. Statistics from the Pew Foundation show that 83% of text messages are opened and read within the first hour of receipt. Additionally, a study conducted by Morgan Stanley shows that 91% of Americans have their mobile phone within arm's reach 24 hours a day.
- For patients who are scheduled far in advance, send “Save the Date” emails or text messages about 30 days prior to the appointment.
- Clearly explain, and have new patients sign a written “No-Show” policy. It should clearly detail the consequences of not showing up or calling to cancel an appointment within a specified timeframe. Display the policy in places that are highly visible (i.e. common areas and exam rooms).

- Consider office signage with a clear message about the effects of missed appointments. For example: “An appointment missed by you is an appointment missed by two. This affects not only one person, but the health of other patients, as well. Every missed appointment could have been filled by another potentially ill person, and the length of time that patients have to wait for an appointment is increased. We very much appreciate our patients who honor their scheduled appointments.”
- Consider rewarding patients who show up on time with discounts, a free service, taxi voucher, pharmacy gift card, etc; or hold a gift card drawing for all patients who show up on time in a given month.
- Thank patients who cancel and reschedule in keeping with your no-show policy.
- Use "Max-Packing" during office visits when possible. "Max-packing" is doing as much for patients while they are in the office for any given visit, in order to reduce the need for extra appointments and improve the practice's accessibility. Some strategies for max-packing include the following:
 - Look for any patient who is on the schedule today and also has a future appointment. Take care of his or her future needs during today's visit and carefully consider the appropriate time interval for scheduling the next appointment.
 - Use a checklist of preventive care to anticipate a patient's future needs, and take care of those needs today whenever possible.
 - Max-packing is a good option especially when the schedule is on-time or ahead due to cancellations, no-shows, or unexpectedly short visits. For more information visit ihi.org.
- Consider shared appointment scheduling. For example, schedule families/friends in the same hour slot to improve transportation potential and create a peer-support system to encourage attendance.
- Consider assisting patients in arranging transportation to office visits. Some suggestions:
 - Have bus-stop schedules available at check-out.
 - Negotiate with city planners about adding a bus stop within one block of your office.
 - Explore options for obtaining taxi vouchers from a local taxi service.
 - Implement a shuttle or car service for the practice, perhaps in coordination with other PCP practices or health care facilities in the vicinity.
- Consider offering coupons for “drop-in” child care services in partnership with local child-care facilities to allow patients without available child care to keep appointments.
- Examine ways to expand office hours to include early morning, evening and weekend hours for those who cannot take time off work for appointments and for those that may find transportation or child care easier during these times.
- Implement protocols for clinical staff to teach the importance of appointment completion in their patient education goals for those with chronic conditions. Studies show that fewer visits are missed when patients understand the reason for the follow-up appointment.
- Consider technical solutions that allow patients to check, book and cancel appointments at their own convenience, and to order medication refills online.
- Strengthen relationships with patients to increase their commitment to your practice. Suggestions include sending birthday or holiday cards and assigning nursing staff to specific patients to work with regarding follow-up.
- Consider a social media presence to reinforce these concepts and other preventive maintenance messaging. Invite your patients to “like” your page.