

THIS MONTH: MISSED APPOINTMENTS

DESPITE GOVERNMENT pledges to reduce them, missed appointments now cost the NHS some £575m, writes Alison Ryan.

In the private sector, missed appointments are not as prevalent – but they do happen and can be a real problem for some consultants.

The impact on the bottom line is not simply from lost appointment revenue – there is also the fixed cost of room hire, the missed opportunity of not being able to see another patient and the issue of whether or not the original patient even comes back.

Worse still, if the no-show was actually down to an administration error on the consultant's part, then reputations are at stake.

So how best to avoid these problems?

Careful diary management is essential. Consultants must ensure that effective, centralised

processes are in place, especially if they practice in multiple locations and have more than one secretarial resource.

Each appointment, highlighting time, date and location, should be confirmed either by email, text or letter.

Consider sending a map of the hospital and directions detailing how to reach you, including all means of transport, and suggest that the patient allows ample time to arrive a little early.

If the appointment is provisional, ask the patient to contact you to confirm it, warning him or her that the appointment may not otherwise be kept.

Texts and email can also be very effective tools as gentle reminders. Consider sending one 24 hours before the scheduled appointment.

You may wish to charge a fee for a no-show or ask for a deposit

or payment up front. This is especially helpful in the case of transient foreign patients.

Be aware that you will need the facility to take credit card and debit card payments. This can be expensive for a sole trader, with rental costs for a terminal in excess of £300 a year.

Managing and making a success out of a busy practice presents many different challenges and requires a rigorous approach.

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