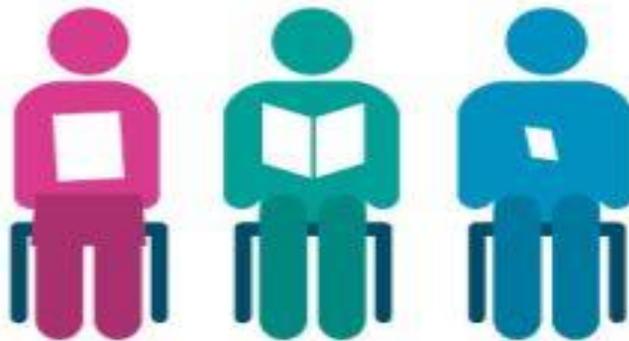


Understanding the impact of patient's not attending health care appointments at GP surgeries in Slough

WAITING ROOM



October 2018

Background

Healthwatch Slough is the consumer champion for health and care in Slough. We gather views from the community, report these views to the people responsible for providing and commissioning local services, engage people in decisions about services and monitor the service provision.

The national picture in relation to patients not attending appointments at their general practice

Patients' not attending appointments at their general practice is a major issue and cost to the National Health Service (NHS). "Did Not Attend" (DNA) rates have an enormous impact on the health care system in terms of cost and waiting times, significantly adding to delays along the patient pathway. The financial cost of missed appointments in the NHS has been estimated, in 2015, at £300m per year, based on 14million appointments being missed per year. By reducing the number of patients not attending appointments at general practices, even by a small amount, would result in a large financial saving.

"Non-attendance is a major issue and cost to the NHS. DNA rates have an enormous impact on the health care system in terms of cost and waiting times, significantly adding delays along the patient pathways. 11.7% of all appointment across the NHS are unattended."
(Department of Health)

The impact of patient 'Did Not Attend' (DNA) appointments at GP surgeries in Slough

Healthwatch Slough hears regularly from residents about how hard it can be for them to book a GP appointment when they need one. We often hear people tell us how they start ringing from 8am, holding and waiting only to find that when they finally do get through, all appointments have been taken. This is a continuous source of frustration and we hear it so often, that it seems that it's become just another fact of life that has no solution due to a lack of resources and the very high demand.

Whilst we accept there are many factors as to why patients are experiencing difficulties getting an appointment with their GP, we became increasingly alarmed when working closely with Manor Park Surgery, that an average of 200 patients "Did Not Attend" (DNA) appointments per month.

"Our DNA rate is a colossal waste of clinical time, money and effort. There is a cost to the remainder of our patients who have to wait for appointments. People forget to cancel; because an appointment has no visible cost to them they think it doesn't matter if they do not attend". Practise Manager

Healthwatch Slough decided to investigate and better understand the impact of patients not turning up to GP appointments.

Healthwatch Slough gathering views and feedback

After speaking with some of the practice managers at their meeting in August 2018, Healthwatch Slough wrote to all 17 practices to ask the following questions:

- The number of patients registered
- The number of DNAs for last quarter April-June2018

- Does your surgery send text reminders?
- Does your surgery have an appointment cancellation line?
- Does your surgery have Community Navigators to do social prescribing?
- Does your surgery have a sit and wait clinic where appointments are not necessary?
- How does DNA affect your surgery?
- Do you have any information as to why your surgery is experiencing this number of DNAs
- Do you have any ideas as to how DNAs can be reduced?

From here our intention was to hear directly from patients:

- How long do you have to wait to get a GP appointment?
- Do patients know how to cancel appointments?
- Have you ever not attended an appointment? If so why?
- Do they avail of other NHS services such as the pharmacy / sit and wait clinic?

Unwillingness of practice to engage

After writing to all 17 practices, followed by email reminders and phone calls we received back only 5 responses.

We asked a practice manager who chose not to respond as to why and were told that it wasn't a priority for their surgery as they only get 1 or 2 DNA's a day, and they had too much else to do to give this area any attention. Another surgery told us that DNA's provided Doctors with an opportunity to catch up with administration. Another surgery told us that although they tried to address DNA's internally, they didn't have the support of their GPs.

What we found?

The system may create DNAs

GP surgeries have a duty to book regular health check appointments for those with Long Term Conditions such as diabetes or asthma – these patients often did not attend appointments on weekdays but were more likely to attend at weekends.

Surgeries do not have Community Navigators doing social prescribing

All of the surgeries we spoke to did not have a community navigator or social prescriber in place yet. This system is proven to reduce DNAs by ensuring patients are getting good access to information.

Ability for patients to sit and wait

Many of the surgeries are reliant on a system where appointments have to be booked. Surgeries that offer "sit and wait" clinics can limit the risk of people cancelling or forgetting appointments by offering them the opportunity to turn up on the day.

Limited awareness of extended hours appointments

From 10 September 2018, all patients will be able to book evening and weekend appointments due Extended Access to General Practice. Appointments will be provided at from a centralised location in Slough - Bharani Medical Centre, Lansdowne Avenue, Slough, SL1 3SJ.

Clinics will operate on Monday to Friday from 6.30pm-8.00pm and between 9am -2pm on Saturday and Sunday, and will see registered patients from all GP practices in Slough. These appointments need to be booked through the individual's registered practice

In summary

From our research it would appear that there is a real problem across Slough with people not attending their GP appointments. However practice managers were reluctant to share their data for various reasons.

Why patients are failing to attend is very important. Are we experiencing a growing culture that 'it's free so it doesn't matter'? Do people's lifestyles mean they are just too busy to commit? In some cases there are clear barriers that lead to non-attendance such as transportation or caring responsibilities. Whatever the reason, the concern is not just the cost to our health service or the fact that patients are experiencing problems getting an appointment with their GP.

Recommendations

- We would recommend that action should be taken to provide better education to patients about the impact of missing appointments. Offending patients need to understand that they should be held accountable when they DNA.
- Further work is required to consider the barriers patients face when wishing to cancel their GP appointment. What is working well for some practices with limited DNAs could be mirrored by others.
- Consider not booking appointments too far in advance as some patients have indicated that this is why they sometimes forget.
- Consider "sit and wait clinics". Some patients said that they would rather sit and wait for hours than not be seen at all.
- All surgeries to have Community Navigators to undertake social prescribing
- Surgeries to prioritise booking general health checks for those with Long Term conditions at the weekend.

With special thanks

We would like to thank Shabnum Sadiq (Orchard Surgery), Dan Jones (Manor Park Surgery), Mohammed Anis (Cippenham Surgery), Poonam Kumar (Kumar Medical Centre) and Kelly Smith (Chapel Surger) who all took the time to respond.

Stay in touch! Help us improve health & care services - keep telling us your experiences.



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Below is the data collected from the five surgeries that responded:

Surgery	Orchard Surgery	Kumar Medical Centre	Cippenham surgery	Manor Park Medical Centre	Chapel Surgery
No. of patients registered	8971	4849	Approx. 5,600	10564	8154
No of DNA's (April-June 2018)	336 (4%)	May-July '18 8.2% GPs 13.66% Nurse	145 (3%)	669	542
Does the surgery send text reminders?	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Does the surgery have a cancellation line?	yes	There is a facility to cancel appointments via text. There is no dedicated phonenumber for cancelling appointments.	yes	yes	yes
Does your surgery have community navigators to do social prescribing?	no	no	no	no	I don't know what this is.
Does your surgery have a sit & wait clinic?	no	The practice does offer on the day appointments, emergency appointments & telephone consultations.	no	no	no
Does DNA affect your surgery?	yes	It's a waste of clinician time & the appointments could have been offered to other patients. Sometimes the same patients DNA and keep making appointments again.	We have policies in place to counter this	Massive strain on patients wishing to book appointments	It prevents other patients obtaining an appointment

Surgery	Orchard Surgery	Kumar Medical Centre	Cippenham surgery	Manor Park Medical Centre	Chapel Surgery
<p>Do you have any information as to why your surgery is experiencing this no. of DNAs?</p>	<p>no</p>	<p>The main reason is that there is no block on the number of appointments an individual can book per year.</p> <p>Patients pre-book appointments well in advance.</p>	<p>Patient education required- type of patients registered who may have an historical inclination to DNA with no repercussions- this is changing now with education and possible outcome for repeated DNA's as per 3 strike policy of removal for DNA without reason.</p>	<p>no</p>	<p>Lack of understanding; language barriers</p>
<p>Do you have any ideas as to how DNA's can be reduced?</p>	<p>By sending warning letters. Possibly fines applied by the NHS.</p>	<p>DNA rates can be reduced by sending formal letters after a DNA.</p>	<p>As stated above</p>	<p>Start sending letters again; remove patients who continually DNA with no explanation; start changing the words on text reminders stating how much the cost is for these DNA's</p>	<p>We currently send letters to persistent offenders, to remind them that someone else could use the appointment if they are unable to attend. We have the text service also. We also have a call centre answering all calls. We are trying to have an open day to educate all patients, but we are struggling to get the PPG to engage as they keep cancelling the meetings scheduled.</p>

