The effect of SMS reminders on FTA rates: An audit.

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Background

A high failure to attend (FTA) rate results in suboptimal utilisation of clinical and administrative staff; it also reduces revenue opportunities and extends the period of time that patients must wait for an appointment booking.

The reported failure rates for orthodontic patients vary between 10-23%.

An abundance exists in the literature on the use of short messaging service (SMS) from mobile telephones to send appointment reminders.

Aims

The aim of this prospective audit was to determine:

The effect of SMS (short messaging service) and postal reminders to postal reminders alone on FTA (failure to attend) rates at new patient orthodontic diagnostic clinics at the Cork University Dental School and Hospital (CUDSH).

Gold Standards

The gold standard was agreed at 0% for FTA on new patient orthodontic diagnostic clinics at the CUDSH.

Materials and Methods

100 consecutive patients received their appointment reminder under the Unit’s standardised protocol (postal only) seven days before their appointment.

A further 100, in addition to a postal reminder, received a SMS reminder 48 hours before their appointment.

Only patients with mobile phone numbers on their records were sent SMS messages.

Results

100 patients were only sent postal reminders only. 24% failed to attend with this cohort. (FIG. 1)

100 patients were sent postal reminders with SMS messages added and 9% of this group failed to attend. This is statistically significant compared to postal reminders only (p< 0.001). (FIG 2)

Conclusions

The introduction of SMS reminders to supplement the current protocol of postal reminders alone reduced the FTA rate by more than half at new patient orthodontic diagnostic clinics. It is planned to incorporate SMS into the Unit’s standardised protocol for appointment reminders at new patient orthodontic diagnostic clinics. Our findings should be disclosed to other departments in the hospital to potentially improve services.

References