

Press release

15 January 2018

Patients show digital preference as missed hospital appointments surge

Nearly half of patients who have missed an NHS hospital appointment say their absences were due to issues with appointment letters, according to a new study.

The independent research¹, commissioned by Healthcare Communications, found almost a fifth of patients (18%) admitted they had missed consultations without cancelling or rearranging it first.

Of those who had missed an appointment, a third (32%) said they forgot to attend, while nearly half (48%) stated letter-related problems, such as the letter arriving too late (17%), not being received (17%) or being lost (8%).

The survey also revealed six per cent regularly leave post unopened for three days or more after it arrives. Over two thirds of patients showed a preference for digital communications, with 68 per cent stating they would prefer to manage medical appointments online or via a smartphone. Nearly three-quarters (72%) said they would like to be alerted to the availability of last minute cancellation appointments by the NHS.

The majority (57%) have already gone paperless with other core correspondence, such as bank statements and household bills.

Surprisingly, the study of 2,000 patients found six per cent thought missing an outpatient appointment would not cost the NHS anything, with over a third (37%) saying they didn't know the value.

However, it has been estimated that almost £1bn is being wasted annually because patients fail to attend. Latest statistics from NHS digital indicated almost 8 million hospital outpatient appointments were missed in 2016/17, compared to 7.5m during 2015/16.

Healthcare Communications has worked with the NHS for 17 years. It pioneered SMS text reminder services and supports 100 NHS trusts with patient communications technology.

Speaking about the research, Mike Cunningham, managing director of Healthcare Communications, said: “These results suggest patient-focused digital technology continues to play a growing role in helping to reduce the number of missed hospital appointments, with many patients showing a preference for a paperless approach. Failure to attend appointments places huge strain on NHS resources. By continuing to develop and introduce new communication tools, the patient experience is enhanced, costs are reduced and resources become easier to manage.”

Last year, Healthcare Communications launched a patient portal that allows patients to receive and respond to appointment letters digitally, as well as giving the NHS confirmation that the digital letter has been accessed by the patient. Barnsley Hospital NHS Foundation Trust was the first to introduce the digital letter technology – reducing outpatient postal letters by 40%.

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About Healthcare Communications

Founded in 2000, Healthcare Communications is the leading provider of patient communication services in the UK healthcare market – working with 140 NHS organisations and delivering 100 million secure patient communications a year, including outpatient appointment reminders, satisfaction surveys and appointment letters. It provides communications services to patients via SMS, IVM, telephone and email as well as providing postal and portal communication channels. Its innovative services are proven to save the NHS time and money and to improve the patient experience. www.healthcare-communications.com

About the research

¹ ICM Unlimited interviewed a nationally representative sample of 2,000 adults aged 18+ across GB between 1-4 December 2017. Surveys were conducted online and the results have been weighted and representative of GB adults aged 18+. ICM is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules.

Further information at www.ICMunlimited.com.

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