

10 simple and effective ways to improve patient attendance and efficiency at your practice

These tips — tried and tested in primary care practice — can help you reduce the waste from DNAs and improve patient use of appointment time.

Reduce DNAs



1 SEND MOTIVATIONAL INVITATION LETTERS 2-3 WEEKS AHEAD OF ANNUAL ASTHMA REVIEWS. These give patients time to plan to attend and give clear instructions on how to prepare, such as bringing their inhalers. You can download and use [templates](#) for effective invite and missed appointment letters. (www.asthma.org.uk/10toptips#SuppDocs)



2 SEND LOW-COST TEXT REMINDERS. One study found these reduced DNAs by 38%. Another showed a text is just as effective as a phone call. Consider sending email reminders too. One of the commonest reasons for patients not attending their appointments is forgetfulness.



3 ENSURE PATIENTS DIARISE THEIR NEXT APPOINTMENT BEFORE LEAVING. When booking a follow-up appointment at reception, make sure patients mark the date in their personal diaries or smartphone.



4 USE POSTERS SHOWING POSITIVE ATTENDANCE RATES INSTEAD OF DNAs. If your practice displays a poster of how many missed appointments there were in a year/month, try swapping it for one with attendance rates instead. One practice did this, alongside other initiatives, and found it reduced DNA rates by 32%.



Maximise clinician time



ASK PATIENTS TO BRING A VIDEO OF THEIR SYMPTOMS.

Watching a video clip in a consultation is often faster than asking patients to remember all their symptoms. Videos of symptoms recorded on smartphones are especially useful because symptoms might not be present on the day of the appointment.



CUT UNNECESSARY APPOINTMENT USE. Almost a fifth of GP appointments are taken up by people who don't need them. Signpost patients to reputable information and support services. Asthma UK provides wide-ranging advice at www.asthma.org.uk (Information Standard accredited) and through its nurse Helpline - 0300 222 5800.

Achieve asthma QOF targets more easily



SPREAD ASTHMA REVIEWS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.

Timing annual reviews at convenient or symptomatic times can encourage patients to attend. For example, invite children during school holidays or during hay fever season. If a large number of your patients work office hours, consider evening or telephone reviews.



TRY ASTHMA REVIEWS BY PHONE TO SAVE TIME AND MONEY.

Latest evidence shows these are just as effective for patients with mild or well controlled asthma, who are unable or unwilling to attend an asthma review in person. Asking the [3 RCP questions](#) over the phone counts towards QOF points too.

Make asthma reviews more efficient



USE PERSONAL WRITTEN ASTHMA ACTION PLANS TO CUT EMERGENCY PRIMARY CARE APPOINTMENTS. Filling out an [Asthma UK asthma action plan](#) (now available on EMIS Web) with the patient has been found to reduce emergency appointments at GP surgeries by supporting self-management, providing patients take a copy home.



ASK PATIENTS TO BRING ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ABOUT ASTHMA CONTROL. Try including the 3 RCP questions or the Asthma Control Test in appointment letters or handing them out in asthma clinic waiting rooms. This will help save time and make the most of the review.

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