upvio

10-Step Guide to

Stopping No-Shows

No-shows can be a significant issue for medical practices, resulting in lost revenue and empty appointment slots. This 10-step guide provides practical tips to help practices reduce the number of no-shows. Implementing just a few of these suggestions can make a big difference.

Why prioritize missed appointment and no-shows?

In the US, estimates suggest that no-shows cost the healthcare industry around

$150 billion yearly.

That's a lot of money, and it doesn't even include the indirect costs associated with lost productivity and decreased patient and practitioner satisfaction.

No-shows also have a ripple effect on your staff and other patients. When someone doesn't show up for their appointment, it throws off the whole schedule. Your team may spend time trying to fill the empty slot or recover the lost revenue, which can impact other business areas.

Evidence suggests that implementing changes to reduce missed appointments positively impacts patient satisfaction and staff productivity.

For example, telemedicine has been associated with *13% fewer missed appointments*. Further evidence suggests that telemedicine appointments *don't compromise patient satisfaction*, making this one way to reduce missed appointments.

Consequently, doing whatever you can to reduce missed appointments is essential.

Here are 10 steps you can follow to minimize no-shows in your practice:

01

Implement self-service online scheduling
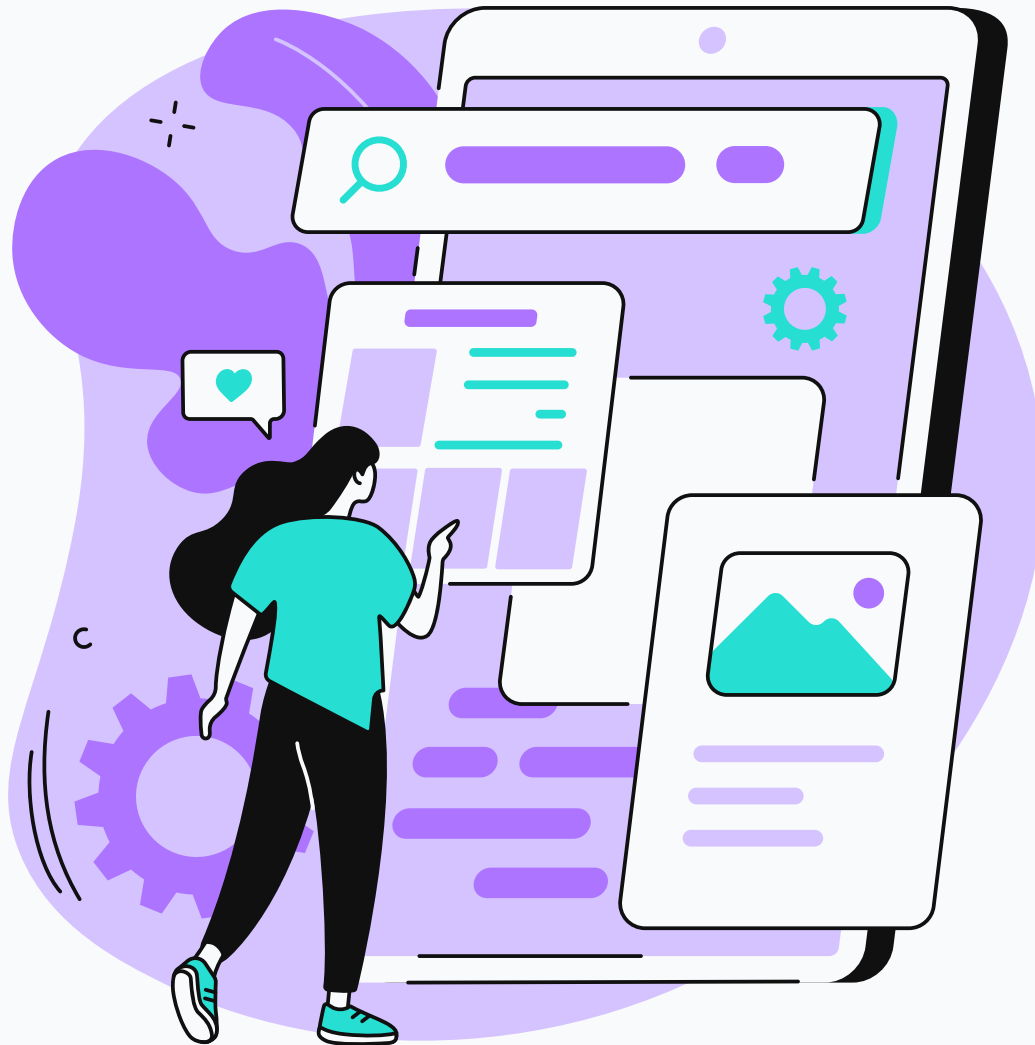
Many medical, health and wellness businesses now offer self-service online scheduling. This type of scheduling means patients can go to the practice's website and schedule their appointments without having to call or speak to a receptionist.

This option can be convenient for patients, as they can log on to schedule appointments outside regular business hours.

Why online scheduling is important?

Data shows that *40% of appointments are booked after business hours* when the practice is closed. Additionally, 67% of patients prefer to book their appointments online.

40% of appointments are booked after hours

67% prefer to schedule appointments online

90% of millennials book medical appointments online

Generally speaking, self-service online scheduling is a convenient and efficient way for patients to book, change, and cancel appointments. It can also help to reduce no-shows, as patients are less likely to forget or cancel an appointment they have booked themselves. In addition, it can help practices reduce administrative costs associated with appointment scheduling, and it reduces the workload of your front desk team, allowing them to dedicate their attention to the patients in front of them.

02

Always-on service

available 24/7

Always-on services are available to patients 24 hours a day, seven days a week. A US group medical practice might include an on-call doctor who patients can reach on the phone in urgent medical situations and online resources such as a patient portal where patients can access their medical records or request appointments.

With an always-on service, patients can cancel or reschedule their appointments anytime, without waiting for office hours, making it easier to free up appointment slots for other patients in good time. As a result, they are less likely to cancel at the last minute.

03

Establish an effective reminder system

Another way to help reduce the number of missed appointments is to establish an effective reminder system. This system should include SMS reminders, as *studies* have shown that mobile phone reminders reduce missed appointments as much as telephone call reminders.

Your system should therefore give patients the option to receive reminders via SMS, email, or both.

The reminder system should be flexible enough to accommodate changes in appointment times or cancellations, enabling patients to reschedule if needed.

By establishing an effective reminder system, medical practices can help reduce missed appointments and improve patient care.

04

Take payments at appointment booking

As a healthcare business, one of the questions you may face is when to take payments from patients. Some practices take payments at the point of appointment scheduling, while others wait until the patient arrives for their appointment.

There are pros and cons to both approaches.

Taking payments at the time of scheduling can increase patient compliance, as they are less likely to forget or cancel their appointment if they have already paid for it.

While waiting to take payments until the patient arrives for their appointment can be more convenient for them, it may also lead to more no-shows, as patients may forget or decide not to show up for their appointment if they have not already paid.

If you do not wish to take full payment when scheduling, you could require patients to provide their credit card numbers instead. This step will allow you to charge the patient if they do not show up for their appointment, which can help to offset the cost of missed appointments.

05 Have a clear written policy

In any group medical practice, it is essential to have a clear written policy in place to prevent no-shows and missed appointments. This policy should be prominently displayed in the waiting area and made available to all patients online and within any paperwork they receive from the practice.

The policy should state that you will charge a fee if a patient does not attend an appointment or cancels with less than 24 hours' notice.

Some practices waive the fee if the patient provides a valid reason for their absence, such as illness or emergencies. Be sure to clarify these exceptions in your written policy, with examples of the types of evidence you require to waive fees for missed appointments.

Making patients aware of the policy in advance can help to reduce the number of no-shows, as they will be less likely to miss an appointment if they know how much it will cost them. In addition, having a clear written policy can help avoid any misunderstandings or confusion about the policy, which can help to reduce the number of patients who cancel their appointments at the last minute.

06

Create an automated waitlist to fill no-show appointments and late cancellations

Not only do missed appointments disrupt the schedule, but they also mean that other patients who need an appointment may miss out — especially those who need an appointment at short notice.

An automated waitlist can be a helpful tool to fill empty appointment slots that open up due to no-shows or late cancellations, minimizing these frustrations.

When a patient cancels their appointment, you can fill their space automatically from the waitlist, protecting the revenue from the appointment slot while increasing patient satisfaction and reducing time spent waiting for an appointment.

It is essential that your system is equipped to recognize the types of appointments required by people on the waiting list, and distribute cancellations accordingly.

07

Use an appointment scheduling software that meets your needs

Appointment scheduling software can be a valuable tool for any medical practice. Allowing patients to schedule their appointments online can help reduce no-shows and make it easier for staff to manage their time.

However, it is vital that you customize your appointment scheduling processes to fit the specific needs of your practice. For example, suppose your practice sees many patients with chronic illnesses. In that case, you may consider an appointment scheduling software that allows you to schedule follow-up appointments in advance.

This customization can help ensure that patients are seen regularly and can also reduce the number of missed appointments.

Continuity of care may also be necessary for these patients since seeing the same medical professionals regularly can help to build trust and rapport while reducing the time taken in appointments to review the medical history. In these cases, your appointment scheduling system should facilitate bookings with the same healthcare professionals where possible.

All of these changes can help reduce missed appointments while providing better patient care.

08

Use software geared toward multi-staff practices

As a multi-staff practice, your system should help you manage your team's time and keep everyone on the same page.

It should allow you to see which staff members are available and when so you can easily assign appointments. It should also send automatic reminders to staff and patients about upcoming appointments.
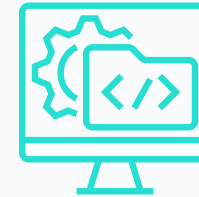
As more practices offer virtual appointments as part of their services, it is also essential to have a software system that can effectively handle different services offered at different virtual and physical locations.

Additionally, it is crucial to match staff to the service they provide and the treatment room they work in. By having a system that can handle all of these factors, medical practices can more effectively manage their schedules and ensure that patients receive the best possible care while minimizing appointments missed due to inefficiencies in your practice software's capabilities.

09

Introduce virtual appointments

Virtual medical appointments can be helpful in various situations — for example, for patients who live in remote areas or for follow-up appointments that do not require a physical examination. If a patient needs to discuss lab test results with their doctor, a virtual consultation can be a convenient and efficient way to do so.

The use of virtual appointments in multi-staff medical practices can also help to reduce the number of consultations missed due to staff scheduling conflicts. For example, if a doctor has a full schedule but one of their patients needs an urgent appointment, a virtual appointment can help to ensure the patient receives the care they need without rescheduling other appointments.

There are also many scenarios where patients are less likely to miss virtual appointments but might miss an in-person appointment.

For example, if a patient has to take time off from work or arrange child care to see their doctor in person, they may not show up for their consultation. However, if they can participate in a virtual appointment from the comfort of their own home, they are more likely to be able to attend, even if their childcare arrangements fall through.

100

minutes time saved for patients doing virtual appointments vs in-person

93%

of practitioners see telehealth as acceptable option

10

Implement reminder email and SMS best practices

We've already covered the importance of reminder emails and SMS to reduce missed appointments. However, if you're already sending these reminders, there are several best practices you can introduce that will make your reminders more effective.

▶ First, it is essential to send reminders on time. Patients should receive their reminder at least 24 hours before their appointment. This timescale will give them enough time to make any necessary changes to their schedule or arrange transportation.

▶ Additionally, it is important to send reminders to the patient and relevant caregivers. For example, if a child is scheduled for an appointment, a reminder should be sent to both of the child's parents and, depending upon their age, the child too.

▶ Another crucial best practice is to include all relevant information in the reminder. The reminder should consist of the appointment's date, time, location, and purpose. It is vital to include any instructions the patient needs to follow in preparation for the consultation.

For example, if the patient needs to fast before a blood test, this should be included in the reminder. Including all relevant information in the reminder will help to ensure that patients are prepared for their appointments and that they understand why they are coming in.

Finally, it is useful to provide multiple ways for patients to confirm their appointments. For example, you can include a link to an online calendar in the reminder email or provide a phone number that patients can call to confirm their appointment.

Giving patients multiple ways to confirm their appointment means that they are less likely to miss it due to difficulties with confirming. By following these best practices, you can make your reminders more effective and help to reduce the number of missed appointments.

Conclusion

While no-shows are a frustrating reality of running a medical practice, you can take several steps to reduce the number of missed appointments. By using online appointment scheduling, sending reminder emails and texts, and providing multiple ways to confirm attendance, you can help to increase the likelihood that patients will show up.

Additionally, by using virtual appointments, you can provide care to patients who might otherwise miss their appointment due to transportation or childcare issues. By following these best practices, you can improve the efficiency of your medical practice.

By using virtual appointments, you can provide care to patients who might otherwise miss their appointment due to transportation or childcare issues. By following these best practices, you can improve the efficiency of your medical practice.

upvio

Radically Impactful Scheduling & Video Tools

User-friendly appointment booking and
video consultation software for health and wellness.

Try for free now