

11 THINGS SUCCESSFUL PRACTICES CAN TEACH YOU ABOUT MISSED APPOINTMENTS

ENDING THE NO-SHOW EPIDEMIC

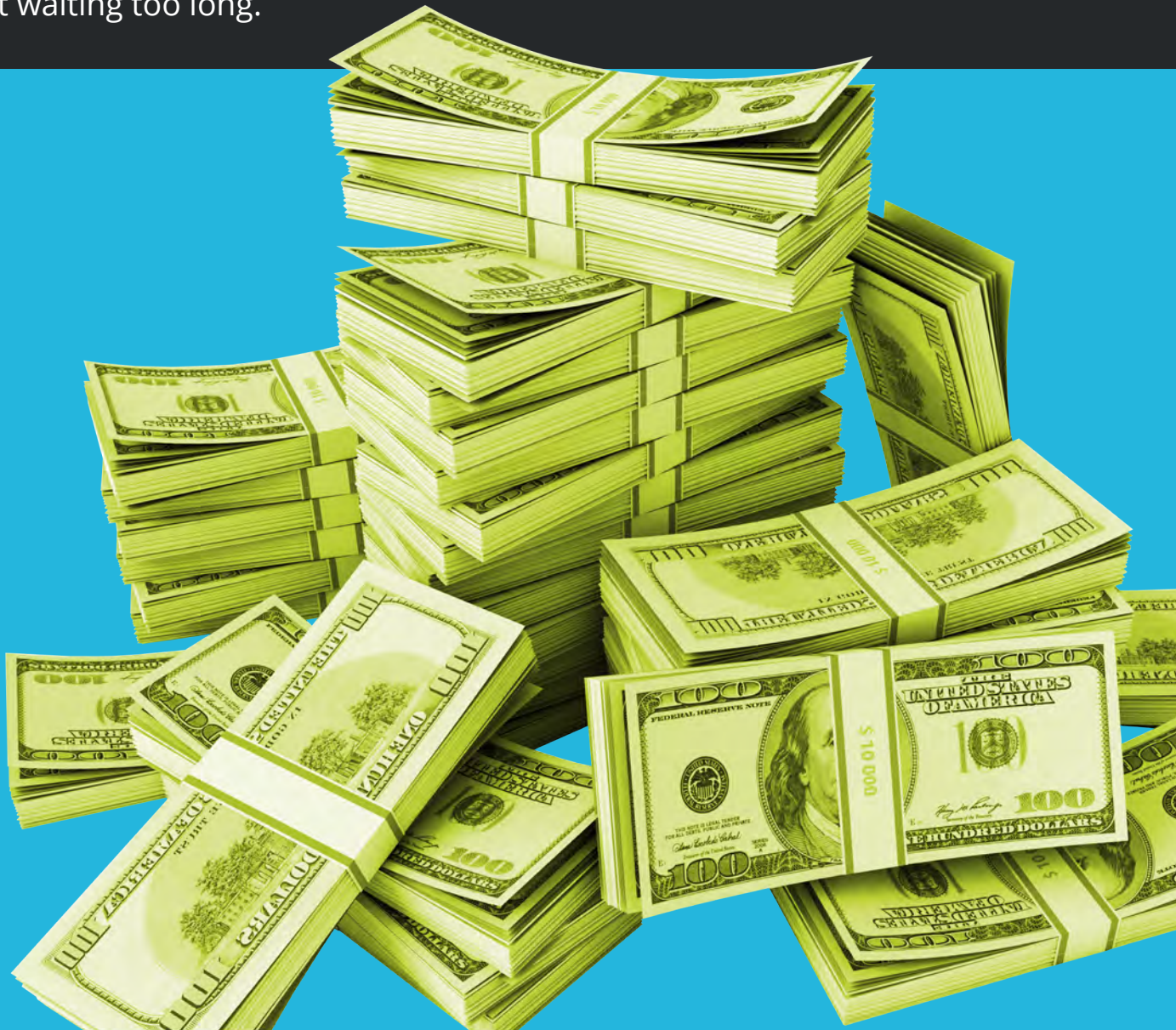


SOLUTIONREACHTM
PATIENT RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Many practices are losing over **\$100,000 a year** due to missed appointments alone.

...how much are YOU losing?

If you're reading this, you're probably one of the many practices suffering from what we call the No-Show Epidemic. The primary culprit is patients who just don't show up for their appointments, but the same symptoms can be caused by cancellations that don't get filled or even patients who walk out because they've been kept waiting too long.



The Cost of No-Shows

Practices will experience an average missed appointment rate of up to **12%** over the year.¹

Unexpected gaps in your schedule don't just waste time and raise your blood pressure; in a field where time equals money, even a few no-shows per week rob you of (and waste) tens of thousands of dollars every year.

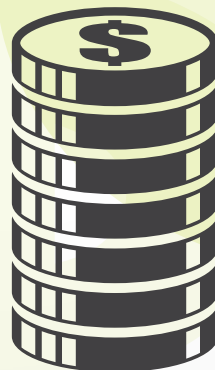
Missed Revenue

Depending on the purpose of the appointment, two no-shows a day can mean a loss of \$200-900 for the practice. This means that, over the course of a year, the practice has sacrificed a significant amount of revenue to missed appointments: somewhere between **\$52,000 and a quarter of a million dollars!**

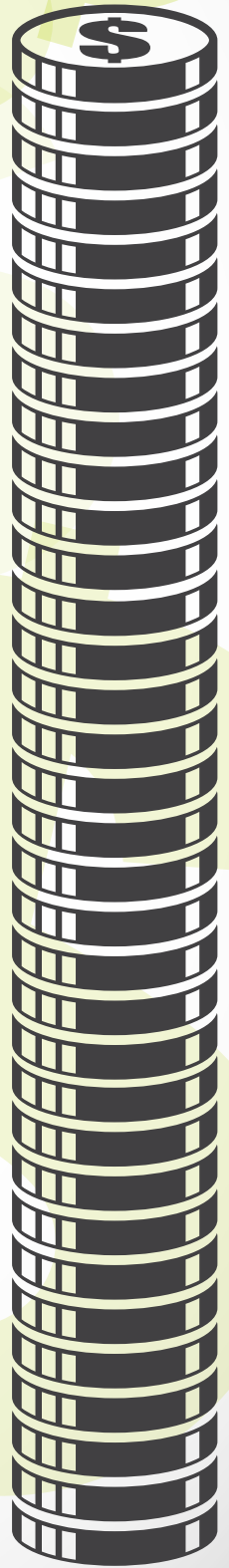
Wasted Time & Incurred Costs

The time spent prepping for an appointment that never showed is valuable time your staff could have spent on other important tasks. The worst part? **You're paying them to waste all that time!**

\$52,000



\$250,000



The Treatment Plan

The two most fixable problems when it comes to no-shows are 1) a [lack of effective communication](#) and 2) [unengaged patients](#). You may be surprised to find that missed appointments are often set into motion before the appointment is even scheduled!

The next sections describe secrets used by successful practices to prevent and address no-shows. Consider it a care plan, with steps to take before your patient schedules an appointment, after they've scheduled, while they are in your office, and after they have left.

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Technology has drastically simplified the ability for practices to increase revenue and improve efficiency. *The most successful practices take advantage of the benefits of technology* by making use of automated systems that allow them to personalize their patient outreach. As we move through the care plan, keep in mind that the value of patient engagement technology in your practice simply can't be matched, even if you're paying staff members to do the same tasks manually.



Before They Schedule

Whether or not patients neglect to show up is largely affected by the relationship you have established with them before they even schedule an appointment.

SECRET #1

Get Personal (*and Digital*)

Patients are more likely to respect your schedule if they **relate to the people behind the practice** name, so stop engaging them as a business and treat them like friends.

As with our personal relationships, technology has made it ineffective to maintain communication the way we once did. Snail mail—even the personalized kind—just wastes money (and time!) Luckily, the average person checks their email about 34 times a day just from their smartphone⁵, so use digital outreach to your advantage and make the most of the capabilities it offers!

Send birthday messages with a personal touch.

Electronic messages are more likely to be seen, but they also give you a world of options for attention-grabbing personalization. Create a customized greeting by embedding a photo of your practice wearing hats and holding a Happy Birthday sign, or—even better—make it a quick video with the whole staff yelling “Happy Birthday!” .

Humanize your social media.

People engage people. Most companies have a Facebook page, but not all of them understand the value of “keeping it real.” Instead of writing as the practice, write as yourself! Post a selfie of you at the new restaurant you tried last week, or give a shout out to the assistant who is running her first marathon this weekend.



SECRET #2

Show Them What You Know

As their healthcare provider, you have the ability to engage patients in ways that other small business cannot. Think about it: the Internet allows everyone to be an expert and—for people trying to get valuable information—vetting sources can be exhausting. Your patients have already put their health in your hands, so they don't have to vet educational material that comes from you.

If you are relying on in-office tactics like brochures or printed PDFs, you're missing out on the excellent opportunities the digital world has presented for educating your patients.

Send eNewsletters.

Add an education section to the electronic newsletters you are already sending. You can also create series of newsletters that educate patients on specific topics for targeted, engaging outreach.

Educate through social media and blog posts.

These avenues are excellent tools for quickly sharing tips or health news. If patients benefit from the information you provide, they're more likely to read in the future!



After They Schedule

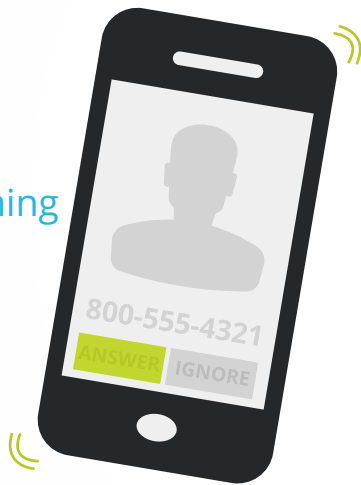
Even loyal patients can fall prey to memory malfunction. Whether they forget the appointment completely or forget to call and reschedule when something comes up, you can proactively take steps to combat it!

SECRET #3

Stop Talking to Yourself

Despite the fact that 91% of US citizens have their cell phone within reach 24/7², patients are increasingly unable or unwilling to answer—even your reminder calls.

90% of cell phone users ignore incoming phone calls³



Text messages are typically responded to within 90 seconds.⁴

People check email on their smartphone an average of 34 times a day.⁵



The numbers make it obvious: reaching patients electronically is much more reliable than hoping they will answer their phone. You don't need to give up phone calls completely, but at least ask your patients if they prefer a text or email reminder before you go about wasting time on unanswered calls and unheard voicemails.

Listen to what they want.

Your patient knows what will work the best for their situation (and memory.) When and how often do they want to be reminded? Ask them what they want, and update their patient information to include those preferences.

Do it the easy way.

Make use of automated systems that will safely pull information from your schedule and contact patients how, when, and with the frequency they prefer.

Don't be a robot.

To accommodate patients who may still prefer the phone for communication, be sure to choose a system that will also automate phone call reminders. However, remember that people tend to hang up when they hear a mechanical voice, so choose a system that provides "natural voice" introductions. When patients answer the phone and hear a member of your staff introducing your practice, they are much more likely to stay on the line to hear the appointment details.

SECRET #4

Use No-Brainer Confirmations

Requesting confirmations increases the level of commitment patients feel. If they say, "Yes, I'm going to be there", the chance that they will go up significantly.

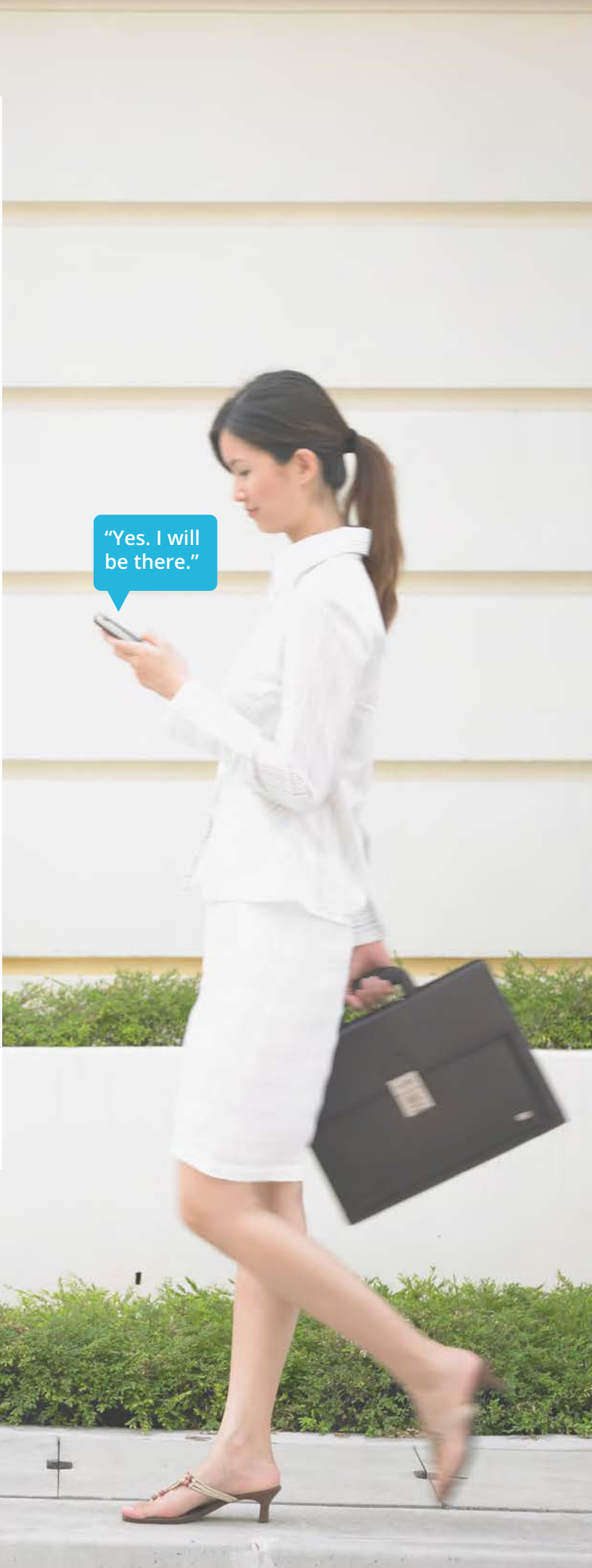
Things to Remember:

Let them text back to confirm.

Request a confirmation in one of your reminder messages. [Let them respond with one word, letter, or click to confirm that they will be there.](#) Invite them to respond with a request to reschedule if they can't make it so that you can immediately begin attempting to fill the open space. Automated systems may even let patients who receive phone call reminders press a number on their dial pad to confirm.

A cancellation is better than a no-show any day.

In a study conducted by Solutionreach, [800 dental offices said that at least 10% of their patients cancel without calling the office.](#) Instead of making them call you to cancel, proactively allow them to say "no." Providing patients who already know they can't make it to their appointment with the opportunity to cancel gives you the ability to reschedule, as well as time to fill the empty spot.

A woman in a white business suit is walking from left to right, looking down at her smartphone. She is carrying a black briefcase in her left hand. A blue speech bubble next to her phone contains the text "Yes. I will be there." The background shows a white wall with horizontal lines and some greenery at the bottom.

"Yes. I will be there."



SECRET #5

Stop Being Hard to Talk To (make it easy to reschedule)

Confirmed patients are more inclined to try and notify you if something happens to come up, and they're more likely to reschedule as quickly as possible. To make sure patients have no problem getting ahold of you, try the following techniques:

Use your patient messaging.

Include your practice information in every message you send, inviting them to text or email you any time. Every message should also include the link to your website, blog, and social media.

Don't make them search.

All of your pages should have a big Contact Us button front and center; if patients have to look around for your contact information, they probably won't.

Market your patient portal.

Proactively remind patients that they can securely communicate with you through your patient portal. Make it as easy as possible to set up their account, so when they want to reach you they know exactly where and how to do it.

SECRET #6

Fill Every Opening

Like over 80% of offices, you may keep a "wait list" of patients who are hoping to get in sooner than you were able to schedule them.⁶ Ideally, you can use this list to fill the spot when you have a cancellation, but it can be incredibly time-consuming to go through the list calling people one by one.

Without a doubt, patient engagement platforms that will automate "ASAP Messaging" are your best bet. The systems will automatically pull the contact information for the patients stored in your wait list and allow you to send out a mass notification with the date and time of the open appointment. Rather than you spending time calling patients, they race to respond and snag the spot.

During the Appointment

Patients are less tolerant about wasting their time sitting in your waiting room. They may need to see you, they may even want to see you, but if you keep them waiting too long they are increasingly inclined to walk out.

We consider a “walk-out” another kind of no-show. After all, whether or not the patient was there to begin with, it’s a missed appointment if no one stands up when you call their name.

SECRET #7

Help Them Be Punctual

Delays in your schedule are typically caused by a constant stream of late patients. It isn’t your fault, but that doesn’t mean you can’t play a part in putting an end to it.

You’ve already taken steps to help patients show up on time by sending digital reminders. Here are a few extra tricks that help to encourage on-time arrivals!

Help them add it to their e-Calendar.

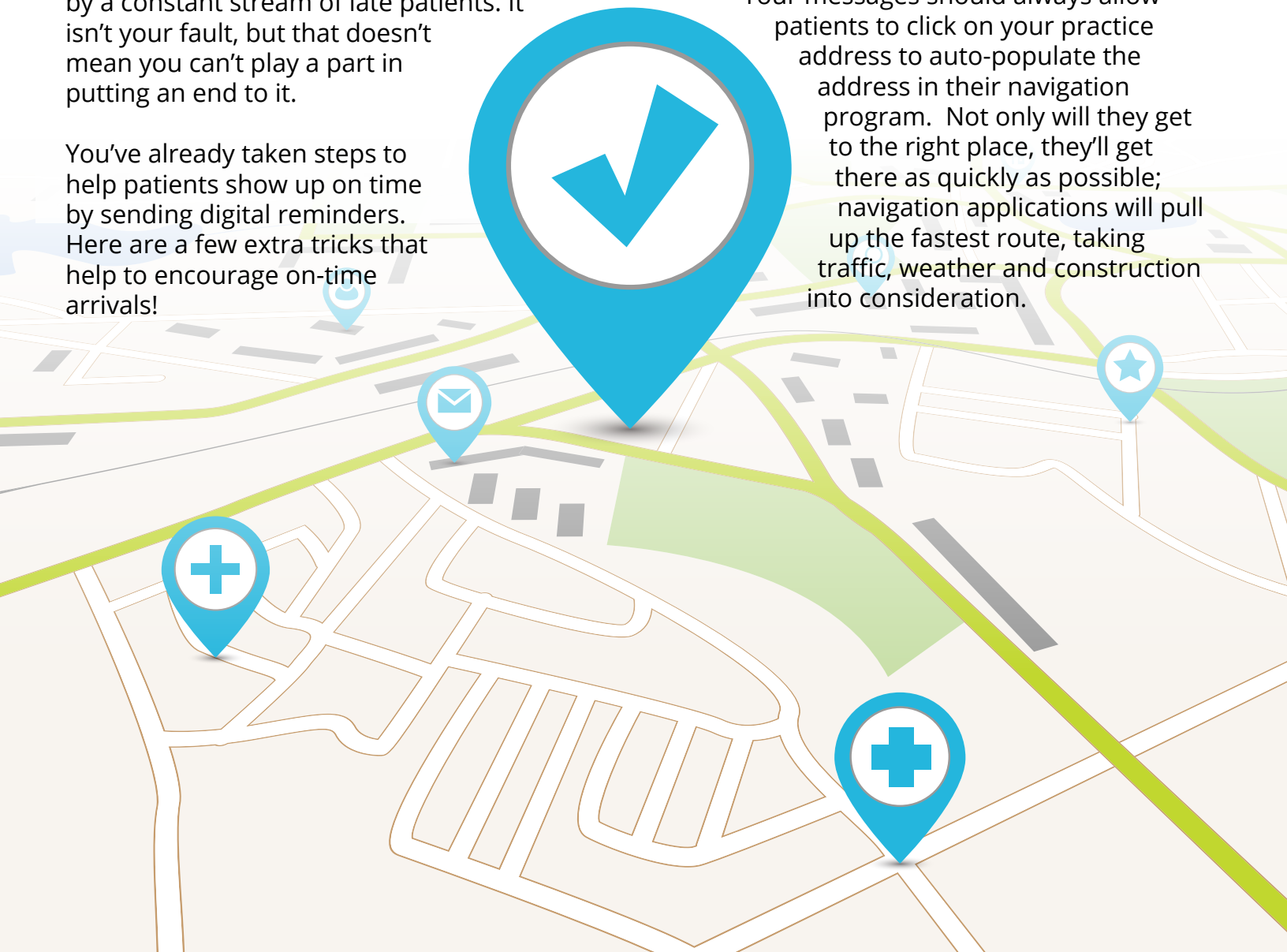
Include a note within your message prompting patients to set a reminder in their e-calendar. Patient messaging services should include a clickable **Add to My Calendar** button in the reminders so patients can automatically insert the appointment details.

Use a service that integrates with Google Now.

These services take it a step further by giving patients intuitive alerts from Google Now if traffic or weather conditions may necessitate leaving early.

Use clickable formats.

Your messages should always allow patients to click on your practice address to auto-populate the address in their navigation program. Not only will they get to the right place, they’ll get there as quickly as possible; navigation applications will pull up the fastest route, taking traffic, weather and construction into consideration.



SECRET #8

Tell Them When You're Late

If lunch rolls around and you're already 45 minutes behind, send a message to the rest of the day's patients and let them know.

Giving them the heads up allows you to:

- ✓ Avoid frustrated patients that walk out before you get to them
- ✓ Give them the opportunity to reschedule if they should need it
- ✓ Increase patient satisfaction—being considerate enough to let them know you're behind is often even better for earning their loyalty than not having to wait at all!

The best way to do this is through a system that lets you send mass notifications to a group of patients, and some will even automatically create this group for you.





SECRET #9

Don't Let Them Get Bored

Sometimes a longer-than-preferable wait time will happen, and the trick becomes keeping them entertained and engaged. Before hiring a rent-a-clown, try these tricks:

Start using a digital check-in device.

Handing patients a tablet and letting them check-in digitally is an excellent way to make the waiting room more enjoyable and productive. It's more fun than filling out papers (plus it eliminates shredding and illegible handwriting), but the device can also assist in long-term patient engagement. Choose an application that will let patients browse through the educational newsletters you have available and opt-in to topics that interest or benefit them.

Treat them like guests.

Especially when you're running behind, personalize their experience. Inviting waiting rooms are harder to walk out of, so take time to make it comfortable. Keep a friendly and

engaging front desk staff; set out a tray that has a water pitcher with lemon slices in it; play nice music; and shell out the cash for softer chairs.

Set up their portal and preferences.

Make your waiting room productive! Use the wait time to help patients register for your practice portal, select their preferred communication methods for outreach, and determine the schedule and frequency for their appointment reminder messages.

Connect with them through social media.

Encourage patients in the waiting room to jump on their phone and connect to your social media pages. If you do a health tip, joke, or quote of the day, advertise it in your waiting room and use that as incentive to get them there.

SECRET #10

Respect Their Opinion

Like most of your relationships, people are more likely to respect your needs when you make an effort to respect theirs. Administering satisfaction surveys will allow you to **learn what they want or need and improve your practice**, but it will also show your patients that you respect their opinion. Keep the following things in mind:

Send digital surveys.

Don't ask patients to complete surveys about their experience before they've had a chance to see the doctor, and don't expect them to stop at the desk and complete one afterward.

Learn how to better prevent no-shows.

Systems that automate surveys for your office should allow you to choose the questions, structure, and response options so that your

surveys meet the needs of your unique practice. Customize the questions to find out if your no-show plan is working and how you can better communicate with them in the future.

Automate and analyze your surveys.

Patient engagement platforms will often automate customized post-appointment surveys. More importantly, they may offer built-in analytics or alerts so that you can more easily sift through the feedback you are receiving. For example, set the system up to alert you if a patient submits a negative survey so that you can immediately reach out and address their complaints.



SECRET #11

Don't Forget About Them

Though you care about your patients, it can be easy to neglect post-appointment outreach. Patients often feel forgotten after the appointment ends, and it makes sense that—the more they feel that you have forgotten them—the less they worry about forgetting you. It's worth taking the time to maintain relationships if you want to prevent no-shows in the future.

Follow up.

Most patients love text messages, and—if that is an outreach method you are making use of—it's easy to send a few texts or emails at the end of the day to find out how your patients are feeling after their appointment. If they don't need to be checked on, just thank them for coming in.

Be personal.

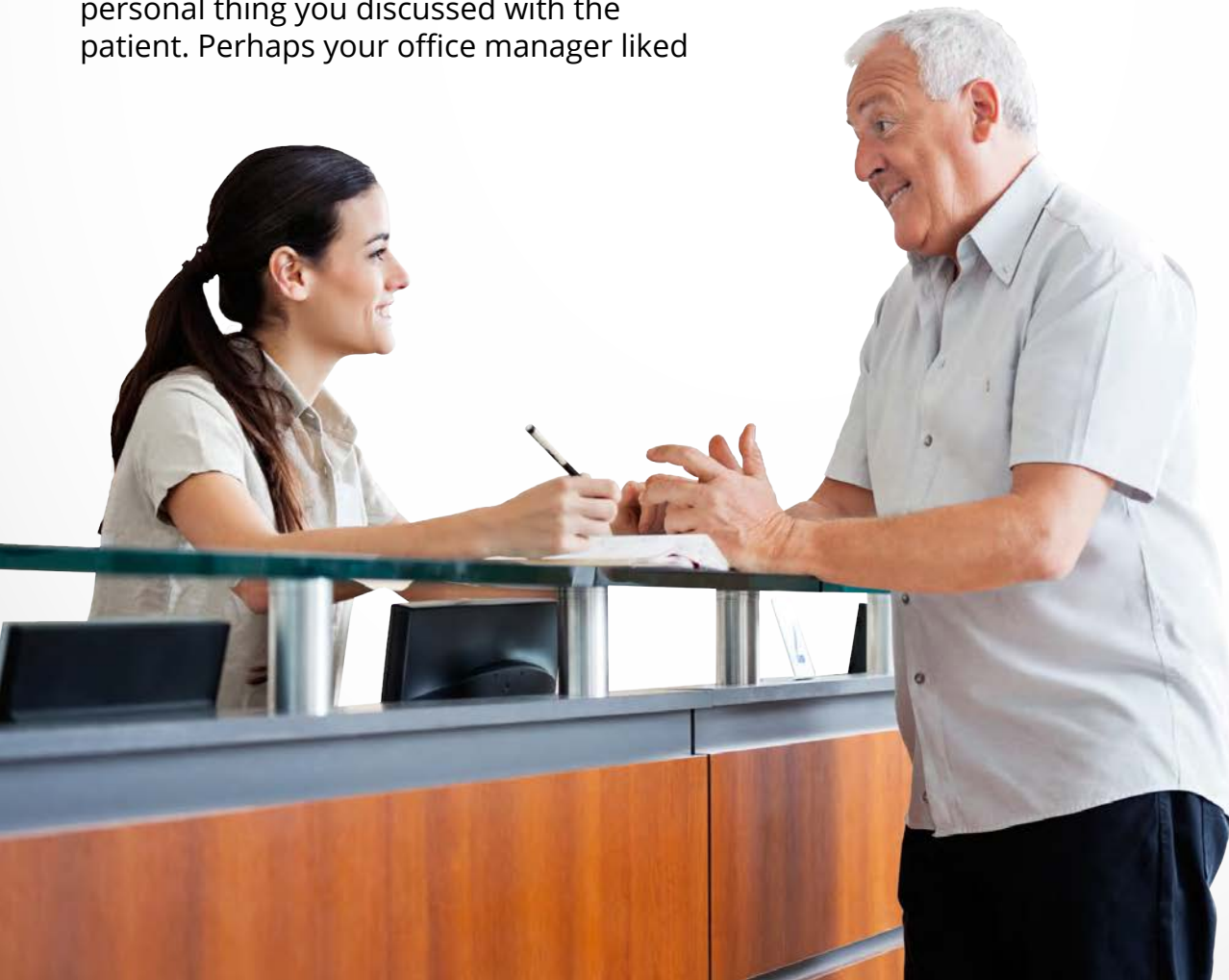
Under their information, jot down one personal thing you discussed with the patient. Perhaps your office manager liked

her purse, or maybe his daughter just left for college.

The personal touch helps to prevent the common feeling of being forgotten the moment they walk out of the door. Plus, conversing personally means that your patients won't see you as a business—they'll see you as a person.

Remember their next appointment.

If your patient needs a follow up appointment, don't wait until they are overdue to call them. Use a system that automates recare to avoid forgetting follow-up or routine appointment dates.



Recovering from the No-Show Epidemic

The plan is a cyclical one. One stage moves into the next, from prevention to treatment back to prevention. Follow-up outreach turns right back into pre-appointment engagement. Keep them on the newsletter schedule, send them birthday messages, and keep writing entertaining posts on your blog or social media pages. The relationship and communication that have been established are the biggest players in whether or not a patient leaves you hanging.

You simply can't afford to let no-shows go untreated, so get started with your treatment plan today. Watch as the number of no-shows for your practice decrease, and take a deep breath...

Welcome to life in recovery.



Sources:

- (1) Sendhub
- (2) Morgan Stanley via Mobile Marketing Association
- (3) Netscape
- (4) CTIA.org via hubspot.com
- (5) Study in the journal Personal and Ubiquitous Computing
- (6) Answers polled from more than 800 dental practices in a 2014 study conducted by Solutionreach