



# No-Shows No More





**M**issed appointments can have a huge impact on your healthcare practice. The wasted staff prep time and unnecessary holes in your schedule can lead to lost revenue. Not to mention the effects your patients will feel from the interruption in care, longer wait times, and decreased accessibility. There is a wide range of reasons for patients to miss their appointments, but most can be combatted with improved patient-provider communication.

As a dedicated healthcare professional, your goal is to deliver quality care to all of your patients, a task made all the more difficult when they don't actually walk through your doors.

Cancelled appointments, or "no-shows," are unfortunately pretty common. No-show rates have been shown to range from 15-30

percent in general medicine clinics and urban community centers, and as high as 50 percent in primary care facilities.<sup>1</sup>

No matter how dedicated and organized your practice may be, it's impossible to guarantee that every patient who makes an appointment will keep it.

No-shows cause a ripple effect throughout your practice: You're not able to provide the treatment the patient needs, valuable staff time is wasted preparing needlessly, the quality of care for other patients takes a hit, and it strikes a serious blow to your bottom line.

# The Rate of No-Shows



19%

AVERAGE  
NO-SHOW RATE

BioMed Central (BMC) Health Services conducted a 12-year study of no-show rates at 10 regional/community hospitals in Houston, including primary care and various subspecialty settings (gastrointestinal, audiology, urology, etc.). The goal was to evaluate the prevalence, predictors, and economic consequences of patient no-shows.

In the 10 hospitals studied, the average no-show rate was 19 percent. Other studies have placed the rate at 10-30 percent for inner-city clinics, community health centers and university medical centers, 2-15 percent for private practices<sup>3</sup> and over 20 percent at the national level.<sup>4</sup> An investigation of large scale no-show patterns within the Veterans Health Administration found **men had a higher no-show rate than women (to age 65) and new patients fail to keep appointments at higher rates than established patients.**<sup>5</sup>

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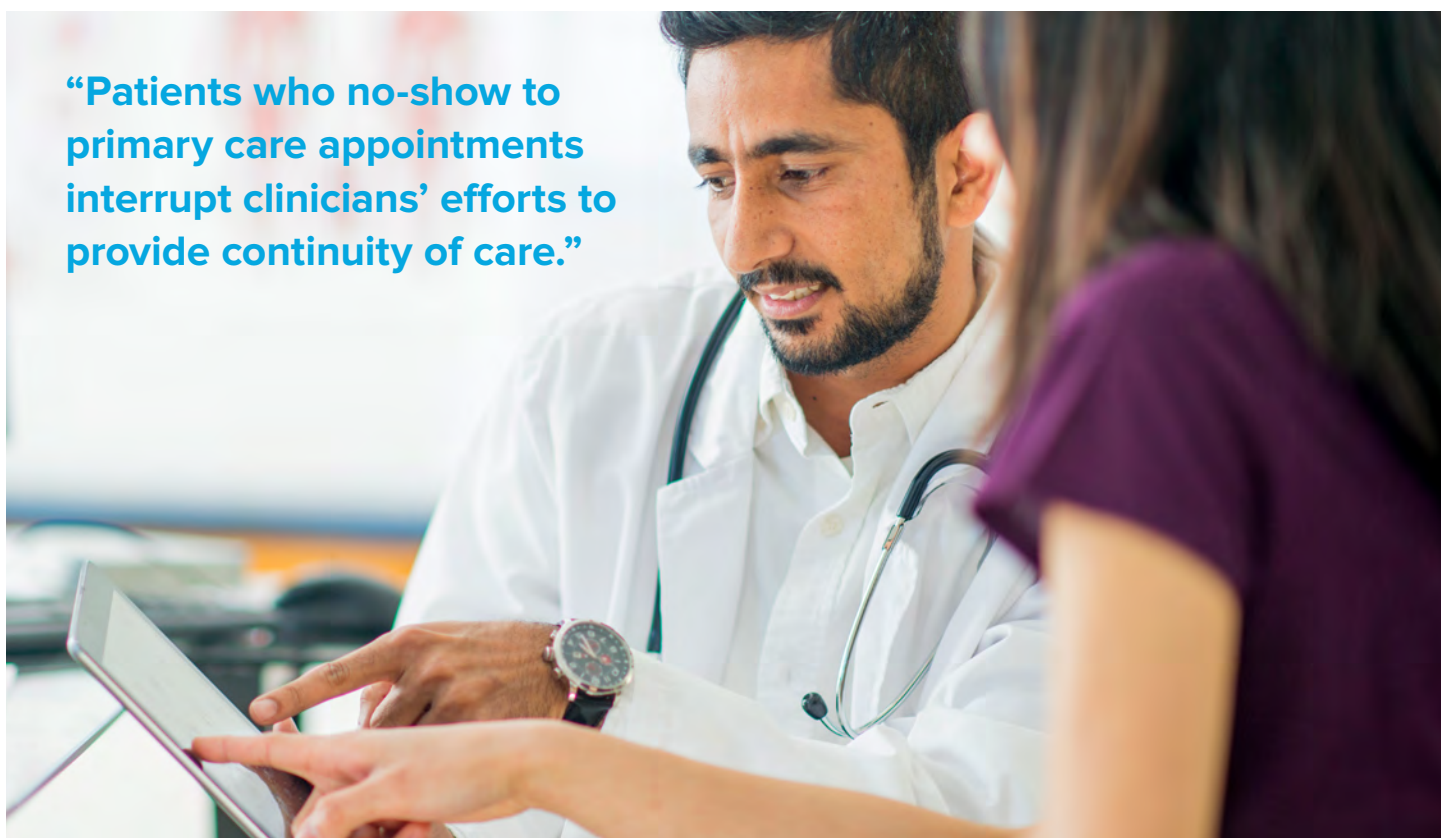
**The financial loss attributed to no-shows can be very high. No-show interventions reduce the no-show rate; but can be costly, challenging to implement, and do not resolve the problem entirely.”**

# No-Shows and Patient Health

Patients who fail to show not only impact their own care, but the care of the patients who keep their appointments too. BMC Health Services Research provided evidence that, among diabetic patients with a prior hospital admission, those who did not show for an appointment were at 60 percent greater risk of being readmitted to the hospital

than those who had poorer glycemic control, but kept their appointments.<sup>6</sup>

“Patients who no-show to primary care appointments interrupt clinicians’ efforts to provide continuity of care,” the report stated.



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At the Evans Army Hospital in Fort Carson, Colorado, no-shows have a huge impact on the care available to others. “If we can’t rebook it, access

across the board decreases,” said Maj. Jason Anderson, chief administrator of the hospital. “If the next patient is early, the provider can

see them. But this doesn’t normally happen. **A habitual no-show can take up to five slots with rebooking their appointments. This**

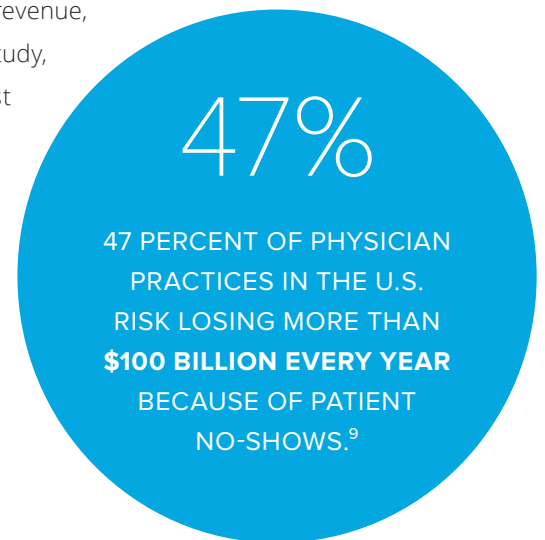
**is denying several of our patients the opportunity to receive the care they need.”<sup>7</sup>**

# No-Shows and Revenue



No-show patients have a major impact on revenue, too. In the BMC study, the estimated cost of no-shows for the 10 clinics in 2008 was \$14.58 million (including labor, lab rescheduling, paperwork, etc.) In 2005, the estimated cost reached a high of \$16.65 million.<sup>2</sup> The Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson hospital, meanwhile, saw 13,244 no-shows in 2015, for an estimated cost of approximately \$2 million.<sup>8</sup>

Overall, group clinics (which account for 47 percent of physician practices in the U.S.) risk losing more than \$100 billion every year because of patient no-shows.<sup>9</sup>



A 2013 study on “Estimating the Cost of No-Shows and Evaluating the Effects of Mitigation Strategies” at an endoscopy suite found that no-shows increase the cost of each procedure performed and can significantly decrease the expected profit of outpatient procedure centers.

# Reasons for No-Shows

The reasons for patient no-shows vary, but a study by the Annals of Family Medicine estimates that **42 percent of patients skip their appointments** because of:



Overscheduling/  
forgetting about their  
appointment.



Not understanding  
the importance of the  
appointment.



A language barrier  
that causes them to  
misunderstand when  
their appointment is  
scheduled.



Worries about  
receiving bad news  
and hoping to avoid  
the situation.<sup>11</sup>



Feeling their condition  
has gotten worse and  
opting to go to the  
emergency room instead.



A limited relationship  
with their provider  
making them less  
concerned about  
skipping an appointment.



Socio-economic  
factors.

The report also notes that some patients may simply feel better and not need the appointment, but don't let their provider know.

# What Facilities with High No-Show Rates Have in Common

## A LACK OF PRE-APPOINTMENT COMMUNICATION

Effective communication prior to the visit—whether it’s gathering vital information, arranging for previsit lab tests, or scheduling follow-up appointments—builds a patient-provider connection and reinforces the importance of keeping the appointment.

A report in the *Annals of Family Medicine* found that 41 percent of no-show patients interviewed did not

fully understand the ramifications of not keeping their appointment. Many believed their no-show actually resulted in a positive outcome for the clinic. When asked what effect her no-show may have on the clinic, one patient stated, “I don’t know. I guess they get free time.” Another said, “You know what, I don’t know. I know that if it’s a crowded day, they’re probably very happy.”<sup>12</sup>

Without building a relationship, your patients will think you are glad they are skipping their appointments.



## AN “ACCEPTABLE” LEVEL OF NO-SHOWS

The frequency of no-shows has led some providers to accept them as a regular part of their practice. Rather than take steps to reduce the number of no-shows, some practices just factor

them into the cost of doing business. Some practices attempt to compensate for this with creative solutions like overbooking. While that may improve overall patient access and practice productivity, it can also increase patient wait and overtime costs.<sup>13</sup>

A study by two Purdue University management professors found that overbooking to compensate for no-shows could, in many instances, have a negative effect in the form of longer wait times for other patients.<sup>14</sup>

“In airlines when you

overbook, you bump customers, and they are the ones who pay the price for overbooking. The rest of the plane goes fine,” said Suresh Chand, Ph.D., who conducted the study along with Herbert Moskowitz, Ph.D. “The problem in healthcare is if you overbook, it will cause delays for other patients

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Saying, ‘We really need you to come back. Is this something you can make work?’ makes a big difference.

When patients see you as their advocate, they respond. **Your big picture strategy needs to really show patients that you care.**”

Melissa Stratman  
CEO of Coleman  
Associates



and that needs to be considered.”

In addition, a study by University of Colorado researchers found that small, private practices that overbook to limit wait times as compensation for no-shows face more risks than benefits compared to larger, busier practices.

### FAILURE TO STRESS THE IMPORTANCE OF APPOINTMENTS TO LONG-TERM CARE

Patients who don't feel a connection with their

doctor, who are new, or visit several doctors in the same practice are all less likely to view a missed appointment as a big impact to their long-term healthcare.

A study in The Ochsner Journal found **patients who feel like they have good communication with their doctor are more likely to be satisfied with their care, to follow advice, and stick to their prescribed treatment plan.** They are also more likely to agree with the doctor about the need for follow-up treatment.<sup>15</sup>

“Saying, ‘We really need you to come back. Is this something you can make work?’ makes a big difference,” said Melissa Stratman, CEO of Coleman Associates, a consulting firm in Boulder, Colorado. “When patients see you as their advocate, they respond. Your big picture strategy needs to really show patients that you care.”<sup>16</sup>



# Strategies for Combating No-Shows

Reducing the number of no-shows is a major focus in the healthcare industry, and improving patient engagement is an essential part of the strategy.

Many practices are recognizing that the processes and procedures that may have worked in the past are ineffective today. New technologies may help them better communicate and connect with patients.

## STAY CONNECTED

The most common reason patients give for a missed doctor's appointment—36 percent in one study<sup>17</sup>—is simply "I forgot." But new technologies can play a major role in greatly reducing that number. Communication by email, text, phone call, or even social media has been shown to be effective in

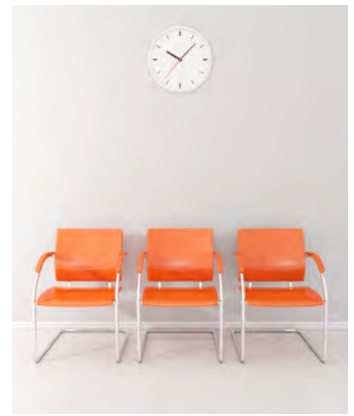
reducing no-shows, and can be personalized for each patient's or patient groups' preferred method of communication.

It's more than just picking up a fancy new method of communication; using technology to remind patients of appointments actually works. A study by the Robert Wood Johnson University Medical Group found that 23 percent of patients who didn't get a reminder missed their appointments. The number of no-shows fell to 17 percent when patients were sent an automated appointment reminder.<sup>18</sup>

Another study showed that the no-show rate among patients who received email reminders decreased by 35 percent.<sup>19</sup>

Reminders can be combined with what is being termed "automated empathy," which are emails that check on a patient's well-being and can be linked to upcoming appointments or procedures.

"There's a limited number of resources in healthcare," said Cara Waller, CEO of the Newport Orthopedic Institute in Newport Beach. "If you do 500 joint replacements in a year, how do you follow up with all of those patients every day? (This) allows you to direct your energy to people who need the handholding."<sup>20</sup>



**36% of patients simply forgot their appointments**



**23% of patients missed appointments without a reminder**



**35% less no-shows from email reminders**

## CONFIRMATION OR CANCELLATION MESSAGES

Encouraging patients to either confirm or cancel their appointment within a specific time frame gives them the opportunity to reschedule their appointment if the current time doesn't work for them. It also lets healthcare facilities adjust their schedules to avoid gaps in the calendar. Reminders to confirm or cancel can be sent 24 to 48 hours before the appointment and patients can even add the appointment to their calendar on their phone or computer.

In addition, **encouraging a patient to confirm or cancel their appointment lets them become actively involved in the healthcare process and increases the chances that they will keep their appointment.**

Personal or automated phone calls, texting, and scheduled emails (whichever their preferred communication method may be) can all be used to send a friendly reminder.

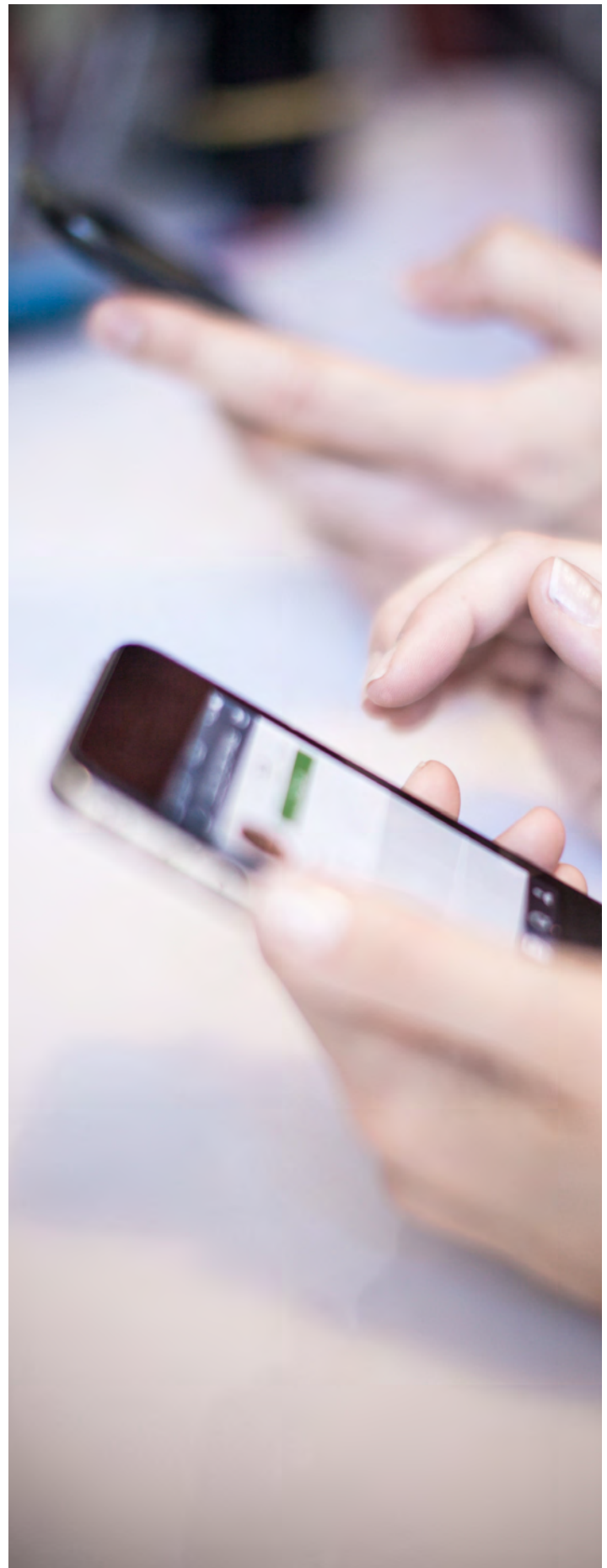
Kaiser Permanente, the nation's largest nonprofit healthcare provider, tested an automated text messaging program at one

of its clinics with the goal of reducing appointment no-shows. The experimental program resulted in 1,873 fewer missed appointments at a savings of \$150 per patient, leading to a total cost savings of \$275,000. The program has since been rolled out nationally.<sup>21,22</sup>

## AUTOMATE WAIT LISTS

Many offices use wait lists to fill vacancies in their appointment schedule due to no-shows and once again, technology is making the process better. Special messaging apps and programs can immediately alert patients on the waitlist of an opening through text or email, rather than requiring a staff member to call each individual patient to fill the slot. The feature improves patient access to care and their relationship with the physician, as well as reducing the amount of revenue lost due to no-shows.

In the UK, a survey by the National Health Service found that **91 percent of patients would accept a last-minute appointment due to a cancellation if they were offered the slot.**<sup>23</sup>





**E**ffective and timely communication through available technology can be an important tool in reducing the number of no-show patients. By automating tasks like appointment reminders or confirmation/cancellation emails and filling last-minute openings—as well as other notifications to engage patients—healthcare facilities can drastically cut revenue loss as well as reduce their staff’s workload, letting them focus on delivering the best care possible.



Solutionreach is revolutionizing the patient-provider relationship. Why? Because we get it. We know providers want meaningful patient relationships that not only impact loyalty, but also outcomes. We also understand that demands on physicians and administrative staff rarely allow for the patient interaction that both sides want.

That's why we created the industry's leading patient relationship management platform. It all started with email and text dental appointment reminders. Now, after more than 15 years and partnerships with more than 23,000 healthcare organizations in numerous specialties, we empower providers with the tools they need to maximize patient relationships and foster loyalty.

Together, we can help you nurture loyal and engaged patients. Experience what happens when you can spend your time where it matters most.

Find out more at [www.solutionreach.com](http://www.solutionreach.com) or call 1-800-955-8444.

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