

Reducing Appointment Cancellations Script

Successfully confirming patient appointments and reducing cancellations and no-shows relates directly to patient communication at the time the appointment is made. By managing expectations early, you can directly impact the number of confirmed and completed appointments.

During a phone conversation with a new patient or while checking out an existing patient in need of treatment, use the following points to discuss the appointment and cancellation policy:

- Reference the doctor to express urgency for treatment.
 - For exiting patients: “The doctor has indicated that it’s best to get this treatment done ___ (immediately, in the next two weeks, right after ___ treatment).”
 - For new patients: “The doctor likes to see cases like yours as soon as possible to assess where things stand and ensure they don’t progress.”
- Help the patient understand why cancellations and changes should be avoided when possible by saying, “We ensure that you have all the support you need during your treatment, so we set aside doctor, staff, and facility time during your appointment slot. That makes changes difficult for everyone.”
- Ensure the timeslot works for the patient by asking if there is anything that might prevent them from keeping the appointment. If the patient answers quickly, you can add, “you don’t normally have anything scheduled at this time like picking up kids or anything? I’m mentioning this because we do charge a fee for appointments that are cancelled within ___ hours of the scheduled time.”
- Receive the patient’s confirmation of the appointment and their best contact information by saying, “By making the appointment, you are confirming your availability for the selected date. We’ll call to remind you of your appointment and go over a few details beforehand. What is your preferred method of contact for the reminder notification? (e.g., text, cell phone call and day/time availability for contact).”
- Have the patient sign a copy of the patient financial policy that mentions the fee for cancellations and no-shows.

Confirmations

Many offices use contact management systems (such as Solution Reach, Lighthouse 360, etc.) to confirm appointments. It is important that these systems are set up and routinely updated for best results. When appointments are properly designated as new patient, consult, maintenance, treatment, surgery, etc., you can use corresponding templates, and patients will receive specific and appropriate messages that will better prepare you and them for their upcoming appointment. You’ll be able to reference forms they must read/complete, the early



arrival time, medication/food restrictions or necessities, and other important details that apply to their specific appointment type.

Call patients who do not reply to text/email reminders, especially those who are booked for big appointment slots that could greatly affect the day's production if cancelled. Leaving a message is not an adequate reminder or confirmation for these cases.

If you do not hear from a patient, consider double booking the appointment or reaching out again to let the patient know that, "The doctor hopes to see you at your _____ (time) appointment, but if we don't hear from you by _____ we'll need to rebook the appointment or a fee will apply."

Cancellations

Less than 5% of set appointments will be cancelled due to unavoidable patient emergencies. For true emergencies (e.g., severe illness, car accident, etc.), it's best to express understanding and let the patient know you'll waive the fee if they reappoint right at that time.

Reappointment should be expressed as assistance and convenience—not pressure. You can emphasize this by saying, "We normally charge a fee for an appointment change at this late date, but I do understand what's going on. Let me get you rescheduled so I can waive the cancellation fee for you due to these circumstances."

For patients cancelling for non-emergency reasons, say "Our late-notice cancellation/rescheduling fee would apply in this case. Are you sure you can't make it?" In some cases, you can say, "I can change the appointment within the same day without charging the fee, and we do have 10:00 available instead. Would that work?"

For patients who habitually cancel or no-show appointments, consider the following options:

- Double book their appointments.
- Do not allow multiple family members to make appointments at the same time to avoid the impact of multiple predicted schedule changes.
- Warn the patient that they've had previous appointment changes and that you would like to work with them to find an appointment time that works best for them to avoid receiving a fee.
- Charge the fee.
- Refuse to book their appointment during heavy traffic periods (i.e., first thing in the morning, during lunch, or late in the afternoon).
- Refuse to book the appointment at all and inform the patient that their cancellation/no-show behavior is incompatible with the practice's schedule. Let them know that things must be done differently or that you can help them find another office.