

Text messaging case study: the Bradshaw Clinic



Introducing text messaging to remind patients of appointments has significantly reduced DNA rates, writes **James Sutherland**, manager of the Bradshaw Clinic in Derby, enabling the clinic to see more patients and tackle the problems of substance misuse



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Established in October 2006, Derby’s substance misuse clinic, the Bradshaw Clinic, is a joint initiative led by Derby Community Safety Partnership on behalf of the local authority and NHS Derby City. The clinic cares for drug users in Derby using a harm reduction approach within a primary care setting. The clinic, which is the first of its kind in the UK, offers substitute prescribing and needle exchange facilities, together with outreach services from maternity and sexual health.

Challenges faced

With our overall objectives to provide and maintain easy access, low waiting times and patient retentions in line with national and local targets, we sought to look at challenges faced as a result of missed appointments. We embarked on a campaign to discuss this matter with patients to understand reasons why they did not attend booked appointments. The two most popular responses to this survey showed that patients “simply forgot” or “did not realise” they had an appointment.

Response to challenges faced

We looked at two options to tackle our weekly “did not attend” (DNA) rate of between 85–95 missed appointments. First we introduced more robust DNA policies. We then decided to review the use of text appointment reminders. We were able to implement this option using our clinical system, SystemOne, provided by TPP (The Phoenix Partnership), which provides an integrated text messaging service using the txttools application medixt®.

We felt this option fit much better within our work ethics to offer a “cared for” approach and provide much-needed support to patients during their path to succeed.

Outcomes

Text messaging has delivered dramatic results for the Bradshaw Clinic and has reduced DNA rates by almost 50% in its first month. We recognised that tackling the issues of missed appointments would also offer direct cost savings, avoiding wasted clinical sessions and reducing the risks associated with a break in patients’ medication because they forgot to attend their appointment.

We have had an overwhelming response from our patients, who think text reminders are great and make them feel cared for. Some of the comments we have received to date include: “It’s fantastic – why has no one thought of this before” and “I almost forgot my appointment until I received your text – thank u”.

Overall, text messaging has been a great success for the Bradshaw Clinic and we are delighted with the outcomes of our pilot. We also hope to introduce two-way text messaging in the future to engage further communication pathways with our patients. ■

