

How Behavioral Healthcare Practices Can Reduce No-show Appointments

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By Ram Krishnan



Behavioral health providers face numerous challenges. One of the most significant obstacles is getting patients to attend their scheduled appointments. In fact, according to [industry research](#), approximately one in five patients is a no-show to their appointments. Late cancellations and no-shows can derail an office's day, costing time and money and hindering patient outcomes.

This is particularly important in the behavioral health setting, compared to other medical specialties, due to the high frequency that patients are in the office—often one-to-two times per month or more.

There are many reasons why patients don't show up for their behavioral health appointments. Some patients may feel like they're not ready to address their issues while others may forget or have scheduling conflicts.

The nature of many mental health diagnoses can hinder clients' efforts to attend therapy consistently. Those struggling with depression may lack motivation; socially anxious clients may back out of commitments at the last minute. Increased engagement, from upfront

communication to automated reminders, gives them space to mentally prepare and make faithful attendance more likely.

Whatever the reason, it is important for behavioral health providers to find ways to encourage their patients to attend their scheduled appointments. Here are a few ideas:

Clear communication

Clear communication can help ensure that patients understand the importance of attending their appointments and what they can expect when they do. Providers should take the time to speak with their patients about why appointments are important and what they can expect during their visit. By taking the time to have this conversation, providers can help build trust and confidence with their patients, which can lead to better attendance, care, and health outcomes.

Scheduling flexibility

Today, patients want flexibility related to scheduling. Practices offering online scheduling via computer or mobile device make it easier for patients to ensure their appointment date and time complements their schedule. Also, if the patient knows they can reschedule an appointment if needed, they will be more likely to attend. This can be especially helpful for patients who have busy schedules or who need to see a provider outside of normal business hours.

Automate patient appointment reminders

Consumers are busier, more stressed, and more distractible than ever. Automated therapy appointment reminders received one or two days in advance go a long way toward reducing accidental no-shows.

Using electronic health record software (EHR), practices can remind patients of appointments in a personal and timely way. Built-in appointment reminder features can help by automating patient communications with customized messages tailored to a specific practice. Automation makes it easy to send reminders at the right time and frequency either via a text message or email depending on the patient's preference.



Automating messages also helps improve front office efficiency and cuts down on administrative staff time by reducing the number of calls and emails that they have to handle. Not only does automation reduce no-shows and save time, it also helps ensure a steady flow of revenue and a schedule full of patients.

While automated reminders can be a useful feature, they need to be strategically used and timing is everything. If the appointment reminder is sent too early, the patient may forget about it. If it is sent too late, patients might end up missing the appointment altogether. Finding the right balance is key and it will depend on an individual practice and client appointment cadence. Practices should run a test to determine the best schedule for sending reminders.

While automated reminders are convenient, they can also feel impersonal. To combat this, providers should include a personal message with each reminder. When crafting the messages, providers should include the patient's preferred name, their appointment date and time, and the name of the doctor they will be seeing.

Identify client trends

Because automated reminders help avoid forgotten appointments, they give practitioners a better picture of who is dedicated to the therapy process, who cancels frequently, and who fails to show up even after outreach. Tracking these trends to see if cancellations or no-shows tend to follow a specific program, provider, or client demographic is also helpful. If a program or provider suffers from high cancellation rates, the practitioner may need to intervene, assess why clients are discouraged and uninterested, and work to fix the problem. If certain types of patients show spotty attendance, practitioners will know who to focus on for more attentive follow-up.

The more patients appreciate and trust a practice, the easier it is to build rapport and keep them deeply engaged in the therapy process. And since reminders cut down on missed appointments, patients benefit from regular therapy and move through their mental health journey more quickly. The sheer nature of back-and-forth communication with an office outside of appointments signals that patients are active participants in the process. Patients who feel like active participants tend to show better outcomes.

Encouraging patients to attend their behavioral health appointments is essential for both providers and patients. By taking a few simple steps, practices can help ensure that their patients get the care they need while reducing unnecessary losses of revenue and time within the business model.