

The Failed Appointment

A VIEW FROM THE FOOT

The first issue of *A View From The Foot* stimulated a question from a reader to explain my use of postal reminders for the clinics I conduct.

I used a postal reminder service for 29 years in practice. I only recently changed to a text reminder service. However, for those of you starting in private practice, economically the advantages, I believe, far outweigh any perceived disadvantages in providing such a service. It is a physical reminder with your clinical details displayed for all in that household to read.

I trust once you read this issue then it would give you the inspiration to offer such a service for conducting the initial years of your own clinic.

One of the secrets to building a successful and busy practice is to minimise the number of failed appointments (F/A's) that occur on a weekly basis in your practice.

The secret to minimising the number of failed appointments is for you to take full control in reminding your patient about their appointment.

When you minimise the failed appointments experienced by your practice you will start to maximise the service you provide to your patients and you will also increase your practice revenue.

What Is Your Practice Ethos?

Do you have an open door policy and react to whatever comes in (this is known as *crisis management*) or conduct your work in a professional, predictable and comfortable manner (termed *appointment only management*).

My professional guiding principle for dealing with all my patients is not the old fashioned pain – comfort – pain method of treating their foot problems. Instead it is to provide continuous comfort forever more.

To achieve continuous comfort for my patients then I run an appointment only system to access my services.

I have never had an open door policy as this encourages patients to turn up only when **they** feel they need my service. From experience, with patients being left to their own devices, they will always leave their foot health to the bottom of the list of things to do.

Advantages Of Appointment Only Management

- ◆ **Maintains your professional profile in the community.**
- ◆ **Removes peaks and troughs of the working day.**
- ◆ **Allows you to implement your practice ethos.** Bring back patients when you feel they should be seen
- ◆ **If you have staff it takes stress off by making the waiting room quieter.**
- ◆ **The final and main advantage of an appointment only system is that it allows you to set up a postal reminder system which lets you take full control of reminding your patient about their appointment and this minimizes failed appointments.**

What Types Of Appointment Only Systems Can I Set Up?

Essentially there are two types of appointment only systems that you can implement. These are;

- **Simple.** e.g. Everyone gets ½ hr appointment. This suits either someone who has just setup practice or someone who is going to retire.
- **Sophisticated.** Time tailored to the type of service offered.
e.g. 10 min (dressing / manipulation)
15 min (light routine treatment visit)
20 min (moderate treatment)
30 min (new patient visit)
45 min (biomechanical exam / surgical procedure)

The sophisticated appointment only system allows the practitioner to really use their time in the most efficient manner and is suitable for someone who wants to be busier in their clinic.

What Types Of Postal Reminder Systems Can I Set Up?

Postal reminder systems can be divided into **Manual** or **Automated**

Manual reminder is for the non computerised practice

- Step 1. Choose the week you want from the appointment diary 2 weeks in advance
- Step 2. Pull all patient records for this chosen week
- Step 3. Fill in reminder cards (see sample below)
- Step 4. Re-file patient records
- Step 5. Stamp and post all cards same day each week

May I remind you of your appointment

On _____

At _____

Thank you

Mr. Paul Gabriel Scullion FCPodS
Podiatric Surgeon
The Kirkfield Foot Clinic
4 Kirkfield Cottages
Dublin 15

Tel. 8211347

Automated reminder for the computerised practice

- Step 1. Automatically print chosen weeks reminders (eliminates poor handwriting)
- Step 2. Printed letters loaded into automated fold and insert envelope machine
- Step 3. Letters stamped and mailed same day each week

Some Points To Note About Postal Reminder Systems

- **Helps promote your practice with your patients.** This insures your name is always at hand for relatives and friends of the patient.
- **Encourages patients to cancel or reschedule appointments**
- **Minimises failed appointments**
- **Increases your practice revenue**

If you have not had a reminder system before then I would suggest setting up a manual system first to assess just how it impacts on the running of your practice.

The following example costing should get your creative thoughts working (just add your own clinic's figures).

Manual reminder system basic costs

How many patients do you treat per week?

e.g. 50 per week x 50 wk per year = 2500 per year

How many failed appointments do you have per week?

e.g. 6 F/A's per week x 50 wk per year = 300 F/A's per year

If your fee per treatment is €65

€65 x 300 F/A's = **€19,500 potential loss per year**

Printed card and postage costs

2500 cards printed = € 350.00

2500 stamps x 72c = €1800.00

Total = €2150.00

Note

€2150 ÷ €65 treatment fee = **33 patient visits would pay for this full year service**

In conclusion

33 patient visits as a percentage of the 300 F/A's = **approximately 10%**

In other words a 10 % success rate in having an otherwise failed appointment patient turn up for their appointment is all that is needed to support this full year service.

What if the reminder system produced a 70% success rate?

How much more revenue could you take in if you put a postal reminder system into your practice?

In theory;
70% of €19,500 potential loss per year = €13650.00

Minus basic costs = **€ 2150.00**

Total increased revenue = €11500.00

Now would you agree a postal reminder system is worth the effort!