

ELIMINATE THE CHECKERBOARD SCHEDULE

Eliminate the Checkerboard Schedule that's Draining Your Bank Account



The economics of the impacts of scheduling on a medical practice are pretty simple:

FEWER PATIENTS = LOWER INCOME.

And no-shows are the major contributor in turning a solidly-booked day into a checkerboard of open time slots. It's typically part of a mundane scheduling discussion, with no-shows an acknowledged inevitable reality of medical practice — a fact we all live with in the medical services field.

Unfortunately, very little positive progress is being made by most practices to address and improve the situation. The macro numbers haven't really changed in the past eight years: \$150 billion in lost revenue annually in the U.S., costing the average private practice doctor \$200 per no-show. This translates to about \$150,000 per year for solo physician practices, or approximately 14% of a medical group's daily revenue.

Studies have found that in outpatient settings, no-show rates average from roughly 23% to 33%. This ranges from 14% for endocrinology to 19% for primary care and 30% for pediatrics and dermatology.¹ And, a recent MGMA poll found that nearly half (49%) of respondents said their no-show rates had increased over the previous year.²



WHEN PATIENTS MISS APPOINTMENTS, CONTINUITY OF CARE IS INTERRUPTED.

BEYOND THE NUMBERS

Besides poking holes in your financial results, checkerboard schedule gaps also create holes in patient outcomes, loyalty, and your legal shield against malpractice lawsuits.

When patients miss appointments, continuity of care is interrupted. Medication efficacy can't be monitored regularly, preventive services and screenings can't be delivered in a timely manner, and acute illnesses are more likely to go untreated and become chronic conditions with complications.³

Another study found that those who failed to keep just one appointment with their primary care doctor were 70% more likely not to return within 18 months. Missed appointments dramatically increase the possibility that patients will go elsewhere for ongoing care.⁴

Medical liability experts say missed appointments and failing to follow up poses some of the greatest legal risks for physicians. In a survey of 723 patient care sites by the medical liability insurer The Doctors Company, 53 percent of respondents said referrals and scheduling follow-up appointments were their top risk-management problems.

REALITY, BUT NOT INEVITABLE

So, while missed appointments are a reality of modern medical practice, there's nothing inevitable about 'living with' schedule holes at current levels. These numbers can be reduced, usually substantially. Practices actively working to minimize no-shows have the potential to reduce them by up to 70 percent.

It doesn't require complex, expensive systems or herculean effort from your staff. Advances in scheduling technology that automate the best scheduling practices perfected over the past number of years are readily available in leading practice management software scaled and affordably priced for independent practice.⁵





8 BEST-PRACTICE CHANGES FOR TOP-PERFORMING SCHEDULING

With that in mind, here is a summary of the top eight changes top-performing practices make in their scheduling system to significantly reduce no-shows and eliminate the scheduling checkerboard.



NO-SHOWS ARE
REDUCED BY 29%
WHEN A PATIENT
SELF-SCHEDULING
TOOL IS USED.

1. QUICK, AUTOMATED FOLLOW-UP

Establish a clear protocol for automated follow-up on missed appointments. The practice management system should be capable of storing a patient's preferred communication medium (e.g. text, phone or email) and language. When an appointment is designated as a no-show, the system sends a personalized, automated follow up to the patient alerting them of the missed visit, outlining the importance of continuity of care, and offering a link in the message to reschedule online.

Studies have found that no-shows are reduced by 29 percent when a patient self-scheduling tool is used.⁶ Additionally, prompt, documented follow-up is a strong defense against potential liability claims in the future. Other studies indicate that in a post-COVID world, a large and growing number of patients will simply find another provider if online scheduling and schedule management isn't simple and readily available.⁷

2. QUICK-LOOK SUMMARIES & DASHBOARDS

Scheduling software should be easy for you and your staff to manage so you don't have to hunt around to see what your day looks like. Being able to see your daily appointment count by each provider, resource or room will let you fill any holes in the schedule. The best systems can color code by appointment type, add repeating events and set aside blocks of time for walk-ins, same-day reschedules, or emergencies.

Each provider's schedule should intuitively display in a personalized dashboard. The ability to manage scheduling from one centralized place alongside messages, test results, to-do lists, and other key workflow items greatly improves effectiveness and your ability to stay on top of your day.

3. OVERBOOKING

Overbooking is a good strategy that helps you plan for the inevitable no-shows and cancellations. Reporting capability in leading practice management systems allows you to analyze your no-show rates and types, and structure an overbooking rate that will help fill gaps, but not dramatically impact waiting room time. For example, you might overbook between a Medicaid appointment or a follow-up patient since for many practices, 25 to 50 percent of those appointment types cancel or fail to show up. Using a system that lets you double, triple, even quadruple book time slots is your insurance against downtime and interrupted workflow.

4. WAITLIST MANAGEMENT

Offering your patients a waitlist option for scheduling is a win-win. Patients get in earlier than planned, and you fill a hole in your schedule. With a scheduling system that lets you add patients to a waitlist, they'll automatically be entered into the newest available timeslot when it opens.

Automated messaging alerts them to the opening, and gives them an online, self-serve response option, so no staff human interaction is required.



5. RECURRING APPOINTMENTS

Setting up recurring appointments before your patients leave the office helps establish a predictable schedule that also means predictable revenue for your practice. Train your front office staff to schedule the next appointment to lock in the time and the revenue that comes from proactively managing your practice schedule.

Depending on disease standard of care, book the follow-up as near in the future as possible. Research shows that every week that you lower the lead-time between scheduling and the actual appointment reduces the chance of no-shows by 10-15%.

6. AUTOMATED REMINDERS

Invest in a scheduling program that can automate patient reminders and confirmations. Automated reminders by phone, email or online in a patient portal keep patients on track to greatly reduce forgotten appointments. Systems should have confirmation tracking that allows you to attach notes and mark scheduled appointments as confirmed during two-day out schedule checks. Tracking will also give you a history of patient cancellations, no-shows, and moved appointments so you can see problems and patterns to get on top of future scheduling issues.

7. PATIENT PORTAL

Providing online scheduling through a flexible, intuitive patient portal is fundamental to reducing no-shows and maintaining high patient loyalty to your practice, as previously outlined. Patient portal technology has rapidly progressed in recent years, with greatly improved functionality and usability to meet the more demanding requirements of today's consumer-patient. Make sure your portal is updated and fully integrated with the rest of your workflow systems to automatically respond to constantly changing scheduling dynamics.

8. TELEHEALTH

Offering maximum scheduling flexibility to fit patient life-demands is fundamental to improved scheduling effectiveness. Telehealth is key to that flexibility and should be offered prominently alongside in-person visits. The best systems seamlessly integrate telehealth elements such as provider availability, visit types, dashboard views and change management tools with in-person scheduling. Additionally, provider views and patient reminders include the link for one-click initiation of the visit.

All appointment reminders should always also include a telehealth option for rescheduling an appointment that the patient needs to change.

MAKING STEADY PROGRESS

Achieving a zero no-show rate is not a realistic expectation for any practice. Not every patient is going to show up for every appointment. But implementing these techniques over time in concert with upgraded technology will help ensure that in the dynamics of everyday practice, open slots will be quickly and automatically filled, transforming a checkerboard schedule into a solid stream of better outcomes, security, and cash flowing to your account.

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