

Text Messaging to Improve Patient Recall and Revenue

If you're not using
this cost-effective tool,
think again.

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Acquiring new patients and keeping existing ones are both crucial elements of a podiatry practice's growth. Your marketing plan is how prospective patients learn about your services and how you differentiate yourself from the competition. But a retention plan helps you optimize the impact of your acquisition efforts and increases the lifetime value of a patient.

Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC) can be expensive. CAC is computed by dividing the total expenses to acquire customers (cost of sales and marketing) by the total number of customers acquired over a given time.

There are essentially two ways to reduce your customer acquisition costs:

- **Know your patients**—Knowing your patients' wants and needs helps you create a plan that will delight them.

- **Keep them coming back**—for their own medically necessary services, or create an experience that leads to their referrals of others.

A 2022 study of 1,500 patients conducted by market research com-

firms that in many cases, patients actually desire follow-up and recall as part of continuity of care.

To successfully navigate these challenging times, physicians need to look for ways to increase revenue and

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pany OnePoll shows that 69% of patients polled place an importance on text reminders, and one out of three patients has missed an appointment because they did not receive a reminder. While medical staff frequently believe that they are helping save the patient money in the form of co-pays through a lessened recall protocol, the study con-

decrease costs. Perhaps one of the easiest ways to accomplish both is to improve patient recall for at-risk foot care, orthotics, etc. Recall not only provides continuity of care and helps meet patient expectations, but it also dilutes (reduces) the cost of customer acquisition, since those costs are then spread out over more visits.

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One of the biggest challenges to a recall program has always involved the manual labor required for patient outreach. Traditional recall programs have largely relied upon a combination of phone calls and letters. But Research from Pew indicates that eight-in-ten Americans generally avoid answering their cellphone when an unknown number calls. Letters are expensive to send and both mechanisms require significant, expensive staff time.

Enter Texting

What about texting? Keep in mind that with limited exceptions, standard text messaging is not considered HIPAA compliant since it lacks encryption to protect patient health information. To comply with HIPAA, physicians should use dedicated HIPAA-compliant messaging platforms.

Text messaging is valuable for recall programs because patients are already very familiar with it. Many businesses use text messages to communicate with their customers, and your patients are already accustomed to receiving and interacting with those text messages.

AARP found that more than 90% of those 50 and older are texting to help them stay connected with others, and about two-thirds use text messaging daily. This finding is contrary to the popular belief that elderly patients of a podiatry practice would never agree to texting. And since patients' mobile numbers rarely change, once the numbers are in your practice's database, you have a reliable means of reaching patients.

Texting also makes it easier for patients to reach out to the office. When a text message includes a phone number for patients to call to arrange their visit, they simply need to click the number to initiate the inbound call back to your practice. The easier we make that process, the more likely it will be that the patient will call to schedule their appointment.

Automation is crucial. One of the most compelling reasons to turn

to texting for recalls is the ability to pre-schedule text messages to go out to patients reminding them to schedule their next visit, or to remind them of their upcoming visit. If your practice has a portal that patients can use to schedule their appointment, texting can further automate the scheduling process since you can include a link to the portal in your text message. Reducing costly no-shows is essential. According to *Healthcare Finance News*, missed appointments cost the U.S. healthcare system an estimated

billing statement is available and reminds them to pay any open balances. The text message can allow patients to log in to their accounts quickly, speeding up the process dramatically compared to traditional methods like sending paper invoices and waiting for checks sent in the mail.

Texting is also a great way to share informative and educational content, such as foot health tips or PDFs with frequently asked questions about a patient's recent diagnosis.

Lastly, you can also use texting

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\$150 billion annually. Each missed appointment represents a lost opportunity for healthcare providers to deliver care, resulting in financial losses. With no-show rates ranging from 5% to 30% nationwide, each no-show costs a physician approximately \$200 per hour. With a two-way reminder message, patients can confirm their appointments via text. If patients need to cancel, this makes it easy for them to do so and you may be able to quickly replace them with new patients.

Texting can also help verify delivery and can help with medical-legal concerns. There's essentially no way for your staff to know if a letter or email was read or if voicemail was listened to unless it's confirmed. Texting platforms provide near-real-time confirmation of whether a text message was successfully delivered to a mobile phone. If a text message is not successfully delivered, the staff immediately knows that they should use a different communication method.

More Than Just Recall

Texting is not just about recall! Consider texting to also be a revenue cycle tool, a patient education platform, as well as a patient survey mechanism. Text messaging can alert patients when a new

to conduct post-appointment surveys to learn about patients' experiences and identify ways to improve your practice. A study published in *PLOS One* suggests that health surveys conducted over text messages gather higher quality data than surveys conducted over phone calls. The study found that not only did people who answered the survey via text messages answer more conscientiously, but that they also answered more honestly.

Compliant text messaging can improve your recall success and help keep patients on your schedule, lower your customer acquisition cost, and keep your billable volume growing. PM



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