

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Sponsored Article: Automatically prep patients for more on-time appointments

You've probably adapted the way your clinic delivers patient care over the past year and a half. Health care delivery models and patient demands have evolved to support more options for greater access and there are no signs for going back. Demands on clinicians and staff have increased as we accommodate new protocols and technology that must be integrated into workflows.

Clinical experience shows that, when done right, advance patient preparation can ease staff and clinician workload to enhance clinic effectiveness through optimized appointment management.

Clinics use [secure appointment reminders](#) to prep patients for more efficient and effective appointments because more detail can be included:

- Include the reason for the appointment and a note that any other concerns should be discussed in a separate booking.
- Send secure questionnaires that collect important information in advance and replace the requirement to have patients fill out paper forms on arrival.
- Attach instruction sheets that explain what patients need to do prior to the appointment and what will happen during.

Focused patients focus appointments

The number one reason patients do not attend medical appointments is because they forgot.

When patients get automated reminders about appointments they are more likely to show up, and show up on time. However, getting patients in the room or on the phone is only one small part of what appointment reminders can do to help with schedule management.

A major reason appointment schedules are often delayed is that patients often try to discuss more complaints than the one the appointment was originally booked for, and so there is insufficient time allocated for the ensuing interaction. Standard appointment reminders are unable to fully address this issue as a patient's complaint is private information that cannot be shared via traditional email or text messaging.

Using secure appointment reminders, you are able to focus the patient on the reason for their appointment and explain that if they have other issues to discuss, they should notify the clinic in advance to make appropriate arrangements. That way, patient expectations are set, clinicians feel less time pressure, and your schedule properly reflects your workload.

You plan for appointments, patients can too

Secure appointment reminders support on-time appointments by including forms, questionnaires, and instructions that standard reminders can't.

The simple act of asking patients relevant questions in advance of their appointment helps save time during the visit. Collecting answers in advance helps physicians approach appointments with a better understanding, eliminates a few minutes of discussion, and educates patients as to which information is important regarding their complaint and which is not.

"Preparing patients in advance allows me to deal with their concern effectively and then move on to the next patient more quickly," explained Dr. Scott Wilson about his use of digital pre-appointment questionnaires. "Using advance history questionnaires, we were able to see patients in half the time."

Giving patients instructions or questions a few days before their appointment gives them time to provide more thoughtful answers and contribute more meaningfully to their care.

[Brightsquid](#) Secure Appointment Reminders can include questionnaires for histories or screening, and also attachments with instructions for procedures. Those reminders can be configured by appointment type to ensure the right patients get the right information in a privacy compliant way.

Privacy compliance builds trust and teamwork

The privacy compliant appointment reminders built by [Brightsquid Secure Communications Corp.](#) show patients how seriously you take their privacy. 95% of Canadians believe it is important that their private health care information is kept safe. When patients aren't sure their privacy is being fully respected, they are likely to be less forthcoming with important information that could aid decisions about their treatment.

Patients also want to be involved in their care, but often don't want to impose a burden on your clinic. We saw this during the pandemic when patients delayed care to support distancing and to: "make room for those that really need it".

Giving your patients the tools to engage as an active member of their care team by providing accurate and timely information, empowers them to be healthier while also supporting a more efficient practice. The automations triggered by your schedule through an integration with the TELUS Health Med Access and PS Suite EMRs introduce better patient engagement while eliminating busy work for staff and physicians so your clinic can be more effective at providing care.

Editor's note: The views, perspectives and opinions in this article are solely the author's and do not necessarily represent those of the AMA.