



**March 2019**

## ***Reducing Patient No-Shows***

Could that be the difference between a thriving surgical center and an empty waiting room?

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*A thorough overview of the patient-no problem with practical solutions to overcome it.*

# Understanding the impact of patient no-shows

It's Tuesday morning and you are expecting 36 patients. To accommodate them, you schedule staff, prepped your facilities and reviewed files - only to realize that only 20 patients showed up! Not only did you lose revenue, but you incurred additional costs and lost time.

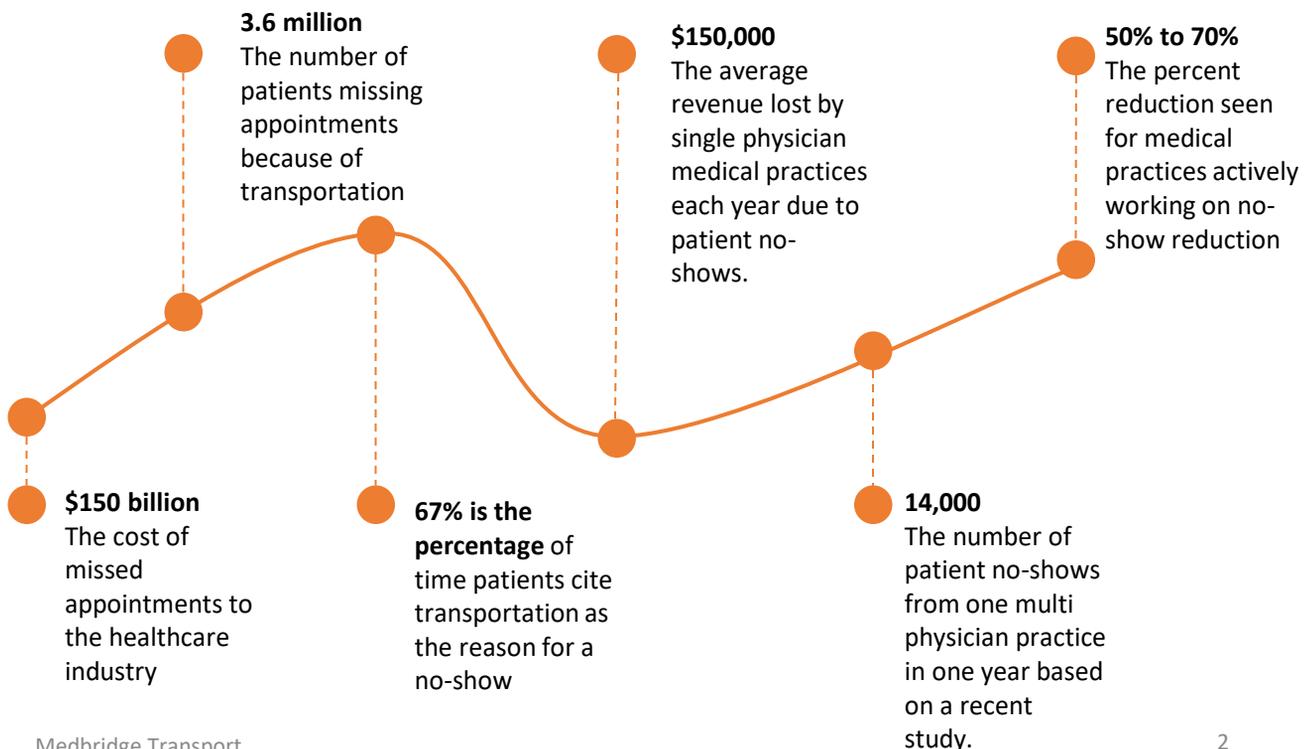
Frustrated?

Well, you are not alone. This happens to medical facilities throughout the country, as medical practices experience 40% patient no-shows on average. Whether you are a healthcare provider, practice manager or family caregiver, one fact remains true for everyone involved in a medical care scenario; we all want what is best for the

patient. Hence when a patient misses an appointment, we tend to look more at the potential impact to the patient's health. It's so easy to overlook the impact it has to the practice, but as a healthcare professional, you'd be remiss to ignore these consequences. After all, whether or not you can continue providing this critical service depends on your ability to sustain and grow a profitable medical practice.

**Figure 1: Patient no-shows represent big issues for medical practices nationwide.**

## Significant No-Show Rates with an even larger revenue impact



As noted above, on average 40% of patients miss appointments, but let's do the math with some smaller numbers. If you run an ambulatory surgical center Monday to Friday and expect 10 – 12 patients a day and assuming just \$100 in payroll, equipment, rent and utilities for each scheduled patient, one no-show a day will cost you \$26,000 a year in idle resources! In reality you will likely get 2 – 4 no-shows. And it gets worse...

We just mentioned the cost of idle resources, but what about the lost revenue? When a patient referred to you never makes it to his or her appointment, you lose the potential billing associated with that case. Assuming the average bill for a procedure is \$1,500 and you lose one customer a week (you will likely lose more), that's \$75,000 in lost revenue!

You may have your own methods of calculating the cost of no-shows. No matter how you run the numbers, when you add up the extra money you could make by cutting your no-show rate by 50% to 70%, you will find it's worth it to do something.

Keep in mind that you won't likely cut your no-shows without some investment in:

- Automated reminder systems
- An advanced scheduling systems
- New staff policies
- Courtesy patient transport

*Patients who fail to show up for their appointments represent a significant expense across all offices in all medical specialties. Some experience this at a much higher rate than others, but it occurs fairly consistently.*

**No-shows also impacts your practice in the following ways:**

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**Empty time slots**

The revenue potential for a medical practice depends on the number of time slots available and its ability to fill those slots.

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**Staffing imbalance**

If you have fewer appointments on your books than expected, it's very likely that you also have more staff on hand than you originally needed.

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**Quality of care**

If your staff is waiting for your no-show to arrive, it likely creates delays in other areas of your schedule, which means longer wait time for patients that do arrive on time.

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# Top Reasons Patients Fail to Show Up for Their Appointments

It can be very discouraging when patients fail to follow through on their long-term medical recommendations. This is especially true in cases where critical services, like dialysis or chemotherapy, are concerned. You really don't want your patients to miss their appointments, but

sometimes, the limiting circumstances are simply out of your patient's control. Hence, it's worth taking a closer look at patients who don't show and potential solutions to the problem.

Here are some of the most common reasons:

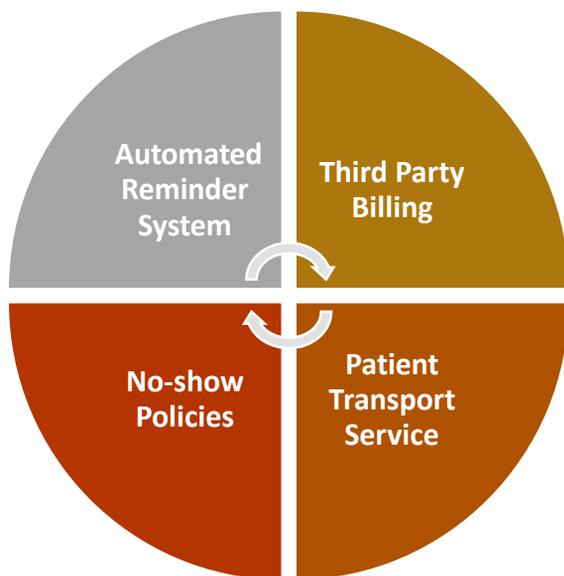
**Cost** - In some cases, the co-pay or other out-of-pocket expenses are enough to deter patients from showing up for their appointments.

**Nervousness** - Patients may be nervous about an upcoming procedure, or they may not think you care enough to worry about them when they don't show up.

**Forgetfulness** - It's very common for patient to forget their scheduled appointment times, especially when patients are either very busy or suffering from age-related cognitive decline.

**Transportation** - Lack of reliable transportation accounts for an estimated 67% of patient no-shows, especially for patients who aren't able to drive themselves or are wheelchair bound.

**Figure 2: A Typical No-Show Mitigation Program**



*When you take the time to better understand these common factors, the problem becomes much easier to address. The best part is that if you take a practical approach to bridging these gaps, you'll see it in your bottom line in no time.*

# 5 ways to Reduce Patient No-Shows

There is no doubt about it; patient no-shows are a costly problem for any medical practice. Unfortunately, while some practices are better at managing this issue than others, it continues to be a fairly common and universal concern. So, if your medical facility is faced with frequent no-shows, keep the following tips in mind:

## 1. Implement an effective reminder system



It seems like a very obvious piece of advice, but you would be surprised by how many medical offices lack an effective reminder system.

## 2. Schedule appointments at the first available time that is convenient to their schedule



If you are scheduling your patients weeks or months out, they are more likely to forget their appointment.

## 3. When patients fail to show, ask them why



This gives you a chance to offer additional support to that patient or identify trends that may be happening across multiple patients or appointments.

## 4. Offer incentives to patients who prepay for their appointments.



Patients are less likely to miss an appointment they have already paid for.

## 5. Partner with a reliable local patient transport service.



Working with a patient transport service not only reduces no-shows, but it also improves patient medical compliance and satisfaction. Moreover, it gives your bottom line a significant boost, offering an incredible return on your transportation investment.

# How to implement an effective program

## 1. Implement a reminder system

**78%**

Of patients who don't show up for an appointment don't confirm their appointments to begin with. What this means is by having an effective reminder system, medical practices will know well in advance the patients who are most likely not to show up and plan accordingly. Do note, that while we know those patients are likely not to show up, we don't know why. Based on recent studies, **98% of patients replied to text reminders** versus only 20% for emails. Hence for a reminder system to be effective, it should have the ability to send text messages to patients.

Based on a recent publication, the timing of the reminders are also important. The study recommended what it refers to as 3 – 3 – 3. The idea is to send the customer reminders 3 weeks, 3 days and 3 hours ahead of the appointment

## 2. Simplify scheduling

Patients are more likely to forget an appointment and become a no-show the further out they have to schedule that appointment.

No scheduling system is complete without robust data, for instance being able to track cancellation at patient level is important as a pretty strong predictor of a patient no-show is a history of missed appointments. Every patient misses an appointment from time to time, but as you look into your data, you will likely notice that 80% of your no-shows are actually due to 15% to 20% of your patients. This is important because as you put in place your policies and scheduling system you only need to customize it to the behavior of that minority of customers causing the majority of no-shows.

## 3. Create a rewards program

As they say, you get more with honey... most practices penalize patient no-shows by charging a small fee on their bill that remains until they schedule and keep the new appointment. It's hard to tell if this really works unless the fee is large enough to warrant a reaction. Let's think back to a study done in 2008 at a daycare center, where the number of parents showing up late to pickup their kids increased after the daycare instituted a small late fee. Because of the late fee, parents started to view lateness as a commodity versus an ethical obligation to the caretaker of their kids. So, instead of fees, consider rewarding patients who keep their appointments and arrive on time with a small discount on their bill or prizes. You could also look into providing incentives for prepaid appointments.

#### 4. *Partner with a local patient transportation provider*

**67%**

Is the percentage of patients citing transportation as the reason for their no-show. With that said, not all patient transport services offer the same type of service.

Depending on the patient's unique situation, one may have needs that require a particular type of service. For example, non-emergency medical transport companies often have two separate fleets: one is for the transportation of ambulatory patients, and the other is reserved for significantly disabled or wheelchair-bound individuals.

So, when looking into a medical transportation company get as much information as possible.

#### **Not all medical transport teams hold the same qualifications.**

Patient transportation is not the same as a taxi, Uber, or Lyft ride. Medical transport drivers, as well as any other support personnel, should be qualified to handle medical situations that may arise during the trip. A question to ask is whether a medical transport team's members are First Aid and CPR certified. This is critically important to the safety and comfort of the passenger. Also, for patients requiring anesthesia, you may want to have a hand-to-hand transportation provider vs. a curbside service.

Finding the right transportation service truly comes down to asking the right questions and getting thorough answers.

#### **Non-Emergency Medical Transportation vs. Ambulance Services.**

#### **Is non-emergency medical transportation the same as a normal ambulance service?**

It's common for people to confuse non-emergency medical transport with typical ambulance services. While ambulance services sometimes do offer non-emergency transportation, it's not entirely common or it can be cost prohibitive. Also, non-emergency medical transports in Texas normally don't provide stretcher transport.

#### **Who to Call When One Needs Transportation for a patient?**

#### **What are the options for transporting a patient?**

Getting a patient where they need to shouldn't be stressful or complicated. Medbridge Transport is here to take the stress and guesswork out of that process; from start to finish, with a team that strives to deliver a great experience every single time.

**Figure 3: Patient no-shows program framework.**



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## A holistic point of view

At Medbridge Transport, while our main service is patient transportation, we understand that no “no-show” program is complete without taking a holistic view of the problem. That is why our solution includes two of the largest mitigators of patient no-shows:

1. Patient Transportation, and
2. Automated Reminders

We are confident that by working with us you will not only reduce no-shows, but also improve the workflow of your entire practice.

*The most immediate action a facility administrator can take is to partner with a location patient transportation provider. With up to 67% of no-shows being due to lack of transportation it's a quick way for any medical practice to get some quick wins.*

*To have a deeper conversation about  
your patient no-show program,  
please contact:*

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