

Welcome to today's webinar, "7 Proven Strategies to Reduce No-Shows."



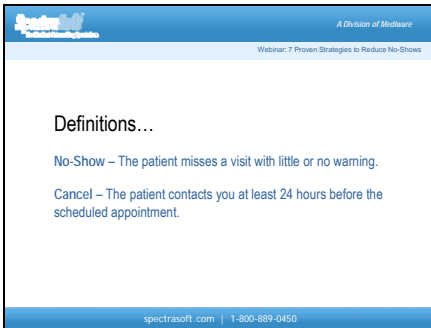
SpectraSoft has specialized in medical scheduling since 1991 and has helped over 5,000 clinics, hospitals, home health providers and independent practitioners schedule smarter. We work in many different disciplines, including physical therapy, radiology, behavioral health, oncology, cardiology and counseling.

In 2012, SpectraSoft became a part of Medware Information Systems. Medware specializes in software solutions for post-acute healthcare, and is listed in *Healthcare Informatics*' ranking of the top 100 vendors in the industry.



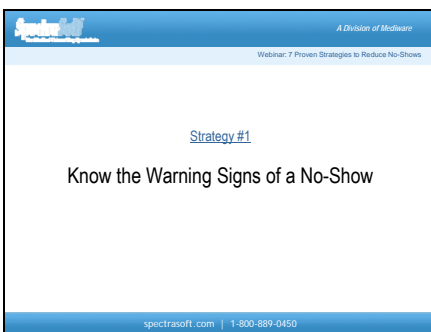
SpectraSoft has conducted a lot of research into no-shows and why patients miss appointments. That knowledge has never been more valuable than right now. Many of you are facing lower reimbursements, while patients are looking at higher co-pays, less approved care and perhaps no insurance coverage at all. As a result, many outpatient departments and practices see no-show rates of 15% or more. That's why it's vitally important that we come up with new and better ways to enhance patient compliance.

Here are some terms we'll be using today...



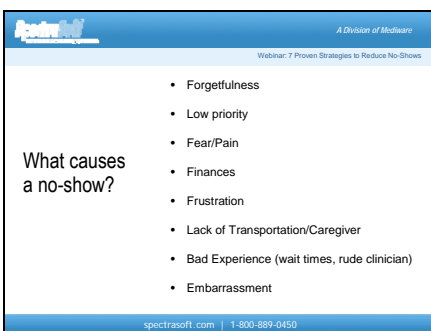
No-Show – A no-show happens when a patient misses a scheduled visit with little or no warning. This means you not only lose revenue, but you also have practitioners and resources set aside that are now idle.

Cancellation – When the patient contacts you at least 24 hours before the scheduled appointment, you have a chance to fill the time slot or reschedule your resources. Of course a cancellation still costs you revenue, so we want to minimize those as well.



Strategy #1: “Know the Warning Signs of a No-Show.”

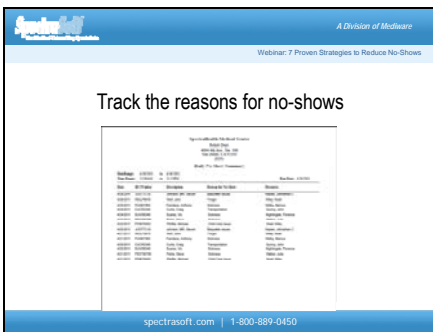
Before we can discuss what to do about no-shows, we need to understand why people miss appointments in the first place. And in fact, there are many reasons...



- Sometimes it's just plain forgetfulness.
- Often it's a question of priorities. If Grandma has to choose between taking her grandson to his soccer game or making her appointment, which is she going to choose?
- Sometimes fear or pain leads to no-shows. If the treatment is uncomfortable or painful, that can lead to no-shows.
- Finances are another contributing factor. Some people are in a position where even the co-pay is a burden. Other people don't have insurance, or lose their insurance.
- Frustration can also lead to no-shows. If the patient doesn't perceive that she is improving, what's the point?
- Lack of transportation is another factor to consider. Some people can't drive and rely on a caregiver.
- A bad experience can also increase the chance of a no-show. Maybe the clinician didn't seem friendly. Or the patient had to wait too long to be seen. A negative experience will make the patient less motivated to attend that next appointment.
- Finally, embarrassment can lead to no-shows. If a physical

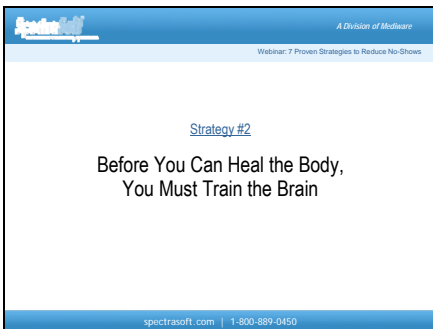
therapy patient has not done his home exercises, he may worry that he will look foolish at his next appointment.

There are many reasons why patients don't show for an appointment. Yet almost all efforts to reduce no-shows focus only on the first reason – forgetfulness. So in the next few minutes we want to share some best practices to deal with ALL the common causes of no-shows.



One way to find out why patients are skipping your appointments is to ask them. Every time someone misses a visit, your front desk should be calling to reschedule. And when they call, they need to ask the patient why they missed the appointment.

This will help you run reports in your scheduling system that can be very instructive. Once you know why your patients are missing visits, you can start to develop an effective program to reduce no-shows.

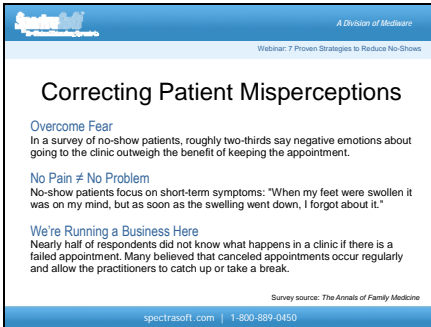


Strategy #2: “Before You Can Heal the Body, You Must Train the Brain”

Once you understand why your patients are missing appointments, you can begin to address those causes.

Your patients have very different attitudes about no-shows than you do. Researchers writing in *"The Annals of Family Medicine"* interviewed patients who were frequent no-shows. Here are just three of the interesting things they found.

First, if you want your patient to keep her appointment, you have to overcome her fears. In a survey of no-show patients, roughly two-thirds say negative emotions about going to the clinic outweigh the benefit of keeping the appointment.

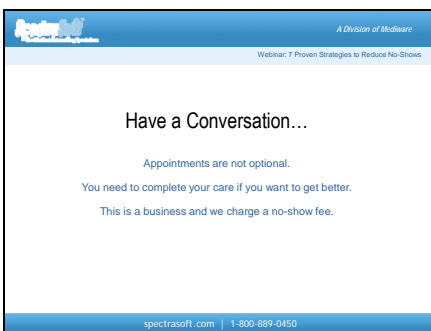


Second, for many patients, "no pain" means "no problem." As one woman put it, "When my feet were swollen it was on my mind, but as soon as the swelling went down, I forgot about it." Most patients don't understand that just because they are free of symptoms, doesn't mean they are healthy.

Third, many patients don't appreciate that you're running a business and that no-shows cost you money. Nearly half of respondents did not know what happens in a clinic if there is a failed appointment. In fact they often said they were giving their provider a much-needed rest break.

So as you can see, your patients will often have some serious misconceptions about their healthcare.

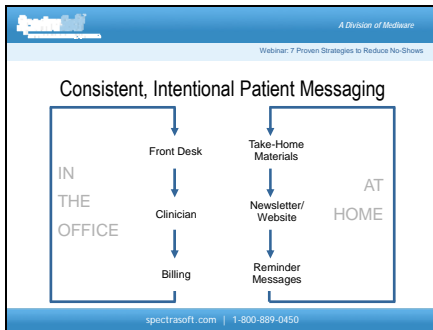
The point is, you need to break your patients of those bad habits and thoughts. So have a conversation with your new patients, and start repeating a consistent, intentional message every time:



- That attending your appointment is not optional...
- That you need to come to every appointment if you want to get better...
- And that this is a business, so please understand that we have to bill you, even if you don't attend your appointment...

When you set these expectations clearly, you will see immediate results.

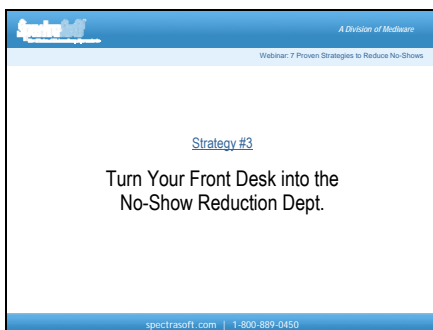
Of course you can't just set those expectations once and expect patients to remember them. You need to repeat them consistently throughout the patient experience.



When your patients arrive for care, they need to hear the same compliance message at the front desk, when they're working with the clinician, if they're reviewing payment options with your billing department, and when they stop by the front desk on the way out.

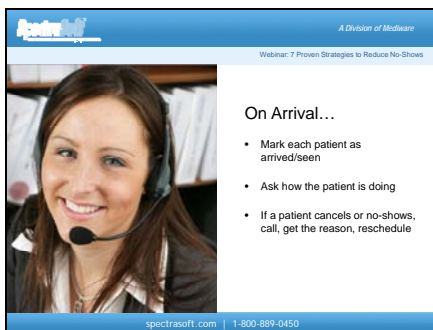
Patients also need to hear those same key points when they are at home – reading your take-home materials, surfing to your website, or when they get an appointment reminder message from you.

It's important that you set high expectations for your patients about making their appointments, and that you repeat those expectations as often as possible.



Strategy #3: “Turn Your Front Desk into the No-Show Reduction Dept.”

We find the first place to set those high expectations is at the front desk.



Your front desk are the first people a patient sees when they enter your practice ... and last people to say goodbye. So they play a very important role in reducing no-shows. When a patient arrives, they need to...

- Mark each patient accurately as arrived and again when they are seen. This is important for pulling accurate data out of your scheduling system.
- Then you want to ask how the patient is doing to quickly spot any issues.
- And if a patient cancels or no-shows, your front desk needs

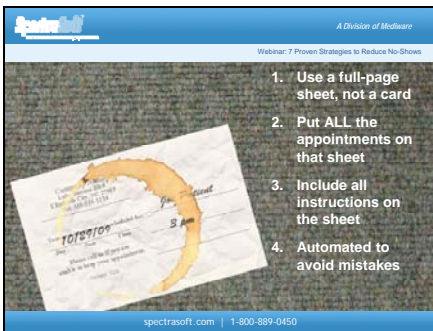
to call the patient...get the reason for the no-show... and reschedule the patient.

At the end of the visit, the patient usually stops by the front desk on the way out. It's important that you work with the patient to confirm the next appointment and repeat your key no-show messaging.

So when it comes to confirming a patient appointment, we have found that small reminder cards like this one are not very effective:

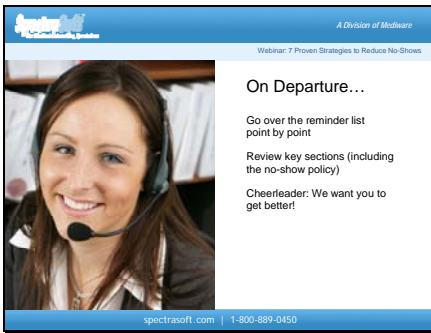
- They don't have much impact
- They get lost easily
- And they often lead to errors because they're handwritten

That's why we recommend that you print a full-page reminder out of your scheduling system. It's big. It won't get lost. And it gives you plenty of room to communicate all the details of the patient visit.

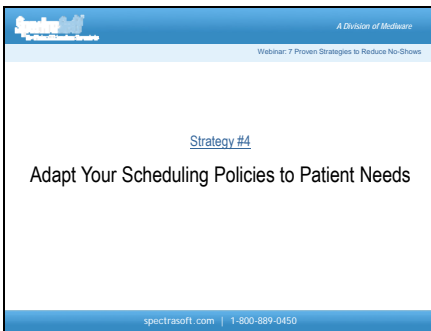


- Put ALL your scheduled appointments on that sheet. We have a lot of physical therapy practices on the call today as well as some counseling offices, and they may schedule 10 appointments or more after that first visit.
- Also include all the instructions on the sheet. If they need to bring a co-pay... wear special clothes... bring their x-rays – whatever -- make sure to put those instructions on the reminder letter.
- Finally, you will want to automate this through your scheduling system. That way it's faster and there's fewer errors. Most systems will do this for you.

On the way out...



- Your front desk person is going to print that reminder letter and go over it point by point with the patient. Eye contact is very important.
- Review the key sections of the letter like the dates and times, the instructions, the co-payments and your cancellation policy.
- Finally, reinforce the same positive message that everyone in your office should be communicating: “We want you to get better!”



Strategy #4: Adapt Your Scheduling Policies to Patient Needs

Conduct a detailed intake with every new patient. Get all their contact information – including caregivers -- and ask them right away if they would like to receive appointment reminders by text, phone, email or all three.



Get new patients in quickly. Hold times in your schedule for new patients, so that you can get them in right away after a referral.

Make a positive first impression. Try to limit wait time. If your patient will be coming back, show them around, so they know where to find the bathroom and any amenities you may offer.

Work with your referring physician or your referral source. Coach them on what to say and provide a stack of brochures w/ photos so the patient can feel comfortable with you.

Also use your scheduling system for more than appointments.

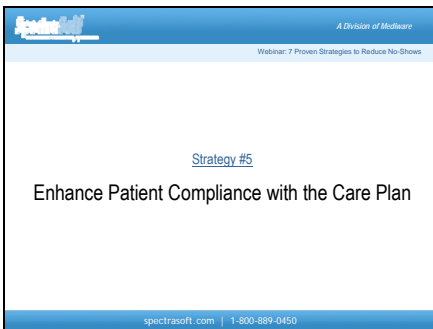
If a patient is coming in for the first time, and you know they are going to need 15 minutes to complete their paperwork, put that event on the schedule.

And if you want to make sure that every patient hears your canned speech about why no-shows are bad and that you charge for missed appointments, schedule that conversation immediately after the first visit.

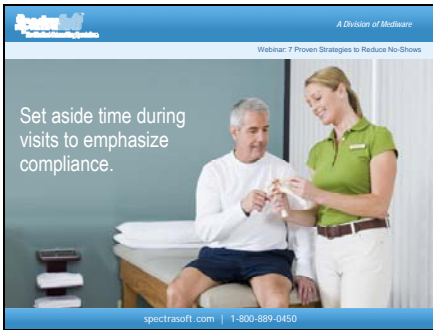


By allotting that time on the schedule, you are going to reduce wait times. You can also close those appointments, so you have a record that your front desk completed that task.

And you will be generating accurate appointment reminders for your patients. So if a patient is scheduled for a 9am appointment, you really want that person to arrive at 8:45 to complete their paperwork. When you put that paperwork event in your scheduling system, your appointment reminder to the patient will say 8:45. And when you think about it, you will get far more people to arrive on time if you tell them to come at 8:45, than if you tell them to arrive 15 minutes early for their 9am appointment.



Strategy #5: Enhance Patient Compliance with the Care Plan.”



The patient relationship with the provider is critical to reducing no-shows. Set aside time during each visit to emphasize the importance of compliance. The more your patient understands his condition, the more he will see the need to attend every appointment.

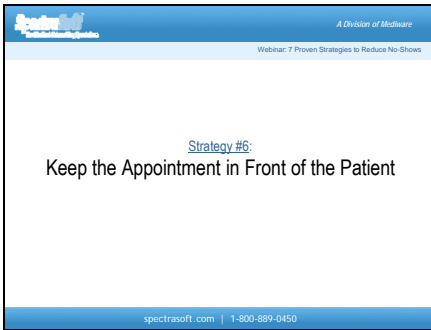


Then look for unique ways improve patient compliance. These are just some of the ideas we've heard of over the years...

- Use email to remind patients about their home regimen.
- Reward compliance with a "Patient of the Week" Award.
- Recommend motivational articles, books.
- Always focus on the goal – getting better

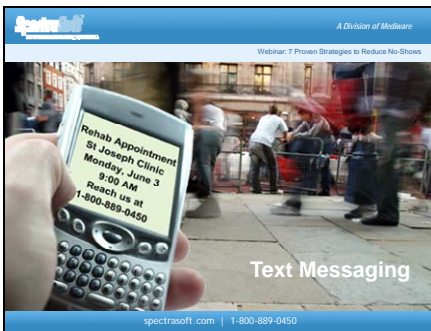


Another reason people don't show up for rehab appointments or similar visits is that they're embarrassed. They haven't done their home exercises and they think their therapist is going to be disappointed. Web-based exercise video services are a great way to keep your patients on their program.



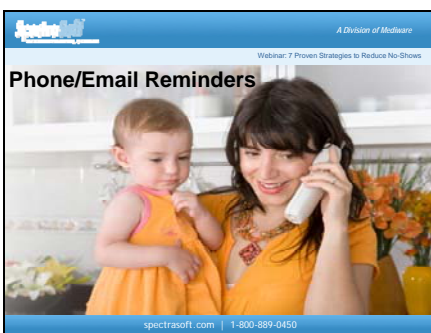
Strategy #6 -- Keep the appointment in front of the patient.

It's important to reach people more than once, in ways they will notice.



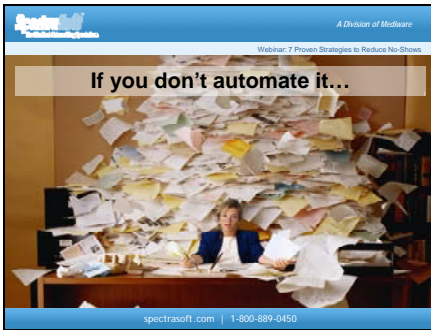
We are finding that the best way to remind patients about appointments is with text messaging. Even many older people text, if only to communicate with the grandkids. Text messages also seem to have higher priority with many patients than voicemails or emails.

An automated text messaging system can scan the schedule each day for patients who have requested text messages, and then send those reminders automatically, so you don't have to remember a thing. You can also use this system to automatically alert providers when their patients arrive, which cuts down on wait times.



Just like the text messaging system, there are phone and email reminder systems that work the same way. They merge the information about the patient and the appointment into a template and deliver those messages automatically. No one ever has to lift a finger.

These systems are incredibly effective – so it's amazing that so many offices still don't use them. Usually we hear excuses like "We have someone who makes those calls." But our experience is...



If you don't automate it, it won't get done. Most practices admit that phone calls and emails simply don't get made on hectic days. With an automated system, all those reminders are sent every day without fail.

Your people are free to spend more time with patients...
Your contact rate goes up because an automated system can work after hours and make repeat attempts...
And the best part -- it's not that expensive. Most systems pay for themselves with just one or two saved appointments a month.

Many people ask us what to say in a reminder message. People miss appointments for many reasons. And especially if you are in a discipline like physical therapy, where a patient comes in two or three times a week, the odds of truly "forgetting" an appointment are pretty slim. So in your reminder message, you're not just telling patients when they have an appointment, but why it is important to attend.



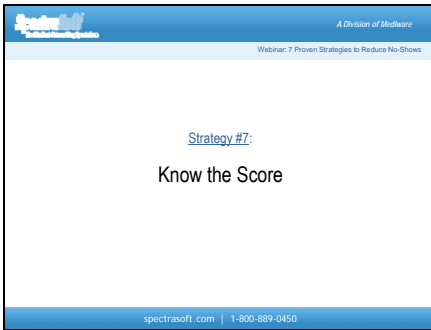
Of course you want to state the day, date and time of the appointment.

Include the location, directions and helpful hints like where to park.

Keep in mind that whenever possible, reminder messages should come from the practitioner. Patients tend to have more respect for the clinician, and there's usually more of a relationship there. So have your providers record the template of the phone message or sign the pre-printed reminder letter.

Don't make it too easy to cancel. A lot of automated systems include all kinds of interactive features, like "Press 1 to cancel." You will want to have the patient call you directly to cancel an appointment, so you know what's going on.

And of course repeat all points we've discussed about WHY they need to attend the appointment.



Strategy #7: Know the Score

We've tried to give you many ideas to reduce no-shows, but every practice is a little different. The primary causes of no-shows can vary by medical specialty, location, patient demographics or other factors. So if you know exactly what YOUR problem is, you have a better chance of solving it.

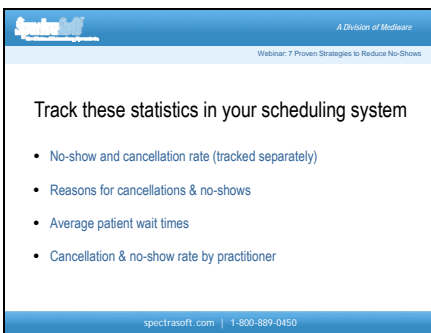
Make sure you are tracking these statistics in your scheduling system.

Start with no-show and cancellation rates. Remember, that these two stats are not the same thing so track them separately.

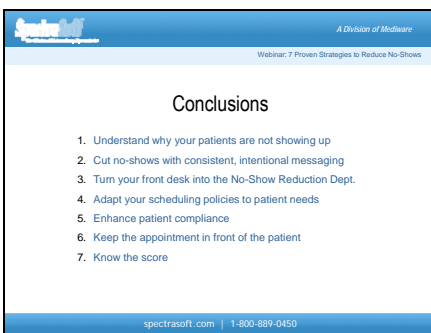
Also, track the REASONS why patients are not showing up.

Then you'll want to track some common causes of no-shows to make sure they are not part of the problem. For example, wait times. If a patient is scheduled for half an hour and you take an hour-and-a-half, there's going to be some dissatisfaction.

Lastly, you may want to track no-show rates by practitioner, location, case type or other measures, to see if there is something you can adjust in the way you treat patients.



Let's quickly summarize the 7 strategies:



- 1. Understand why your patients are not showing up.** There are many causes of no-shows and forgetfulness is just one. You can't find the solution if you don't know the problem.
- 2. Address the causes of no-shows with consistent, intentional messaging.** Everyone in your practice needs to help create a consistent patient experience, where those key message points are repeated over and over.
- 3. Turn your front desk into the no-show reduction dept.** Your front desk plays a key role in reducing no-shows. Communicating with the patient, tracking activity with best

practices, maintaining accurate information – these are all part of reducing no-shows.

4. **Adapt Your Scheduling Policies to Patient Needs.** Hold times for new patients, schedule activities that can reduce no-shows, like the patient intake process and brief chat about what is expected during the course of care.
5. **Enhance Patient Compliance with the Care Plan.** Most of our content had to do with the front desk, but the clinician also has to reinforce the message that no-shows are unacceptable.
6. **Keep the appointment in front of the patient.** Automating reminder messages is crucial. Consider text-messaging if you haven't already. And remember that your messaging should do more than remind your patients that they have an appointment. They need to remember WHY they can't miss it!
7. **Know the score.** You can't manage what you don't measure. When you see that your efforts are producing results, it's much easier to keep working at it.



If you are looking for software to make this process easier, you've come to the right place. SpectraSoft's web-based scheduling system, AppointmentsEverywhere, is ideal for almost any medical scheduling environment. Whether you work in a small clinic or a large hospital system, you can gain all of the capabilities we've described in this webinar.

And if you are in a hospital, you should know that AppointmentsEverywhere integrates with virtually any hospital information system, as well as the MediLinks rehab documentation system.