Outpatient appointment reminder service starts this month

NHS Borders is working hard to improve the way that our outpatient services are run and organised.

We aim to get better at how we agree appointments with patients, and how to help patients attend for appointments. This includes looking into extending the operational day for our booking team to enable appointments to be offered and amended in the evenings as well as during the day. We are exploring the potential of providing information to patients on public transport so they do not have to drive themselves to appointments. We are also looking at how we can minimise the occasions on which agreed appointments have to be rescheduled. The first of these initiatives is to introduce an appointment reminder service on 15 October 2012.

Helping patients keep appointments

Last year, more than 6,000 appointment slots in NHS Borders were lost because patients did not come to their appointments. Missing an appointment could mean missing out on important medical treatment. It also means a huge amount of clinical time not spent seeing patients. The average cost to NHS Borders of each missed appointment is £132. The wider cost to the community is substantial, as these appointments could not be given to other patients who are waiting to be seen and so could have been seen more quickly. Around one in twelve patients do not turn up for their outpatient appointment. This adds up to wasted appointments and resources, costing NHS Borders around £740,000 each year.

We know that many missed appointments are due to patients simply forgetting. To help patients keep their appointment, or cancel it, patients will get a call, reminding them of their outpatient appointment. This starts on 15 October 2012 with Diabetic and Gynaecology services set to test the system in the first instance, with most other services planned to come on stream by the end of October.

Jane Davidson, Chief Operating Officer said: “We know there are genuine reasons why some patients do not attend for their appointments but every missed appointment is a lost opportunity for someone else to be seen. This service alerts patients to their appointment and encourages them to contact us to rearrange, if they are unable to attend. If we reduce the number of people who miss their appointment, we will be able to see more patients and our clinicians will be better placed to spend their time seeing patients.”

NOTE TO EDITORS

How it works

Patients will be contacted 5-7 week days before their planned appointment by an automated Interactive Voice Response (IVR) call to remind them they have an appointment. The message will ask them to confirm their identity by keying in their Date of Birth, and then to
confirm their planned attendance. All patients who confirm their appointment will get a text message, the day before their appointment.

If the IVR call is unsuccessful on all 3 occasions, the appointment will remain for the patient to attend. The patients will still receive the 24hr reminder to their mobile phone.

Patients who do not wish to take up the reminder service can opt out by contacting the number on their appointment letter. The obligation as now, would only be contact with patients by the original offer letter.

The aims of introducing this service are to:

- Help reduce Did Not Attends (DNAs) from 7.3% to 4%
- Provide advance notification of cancelled appointments that can be reused by other patients on the waiting list
- Improve the patient’s experience
- Reduce costs
- Reduce outpatient waiting lists
- Ensure NHS Borders makes best use of its staff and facilities.

Please contact Communications on 01896 825589 or 825520 for further information.