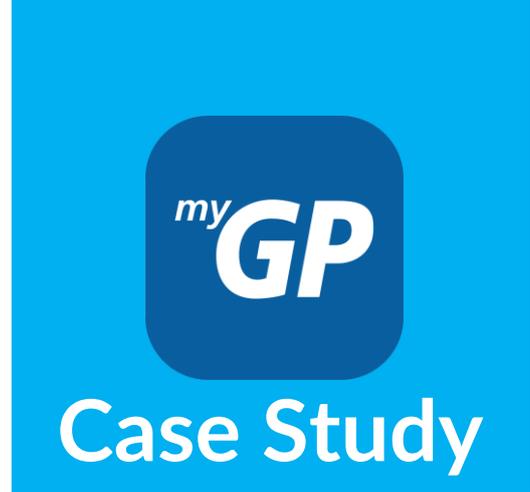# Responsiveness to receiving messages and cancelling unwanted appointments in 2014

Case Study

Introduction

Our analysis focussed on 11 of our top performing practices who generated a total of 1001 cancellations in the month of May. Further focus was made on one particular practice who has been left anonymised for IG purposes. The practice generated a total of 200 cancellations in the month of May. Out of these, 58 appointment reminders were sent out 3 days before the appointment. The remaining appointment reminders were sent out 1 day before the appointment and not considered in this piece of research.

Although the sample was small we can conclude that on an average 70% of cancellations for appointment reminders happen within 24hours of receiving the text message. Out of these slots freed up, 80% can be reused for other appointments. Only a small percentage of patients choose to respond few hours or few minutes before the actual appointment which may in some cases result in a DNA.

Aim

To understand how many freed-up appointments can actually be reused following a cancellation.

Data

A sample of 200 patient cancellations from an anonymised practice was taken into account out of a total of 1001 cancellations across 11 high performing practices. Out of these 200 cancellations, a further filter was carried out to focus on only 58 cancellations where the three- day window rule was used.

Method

We compared the time when the actual appointment reminder was sent out from 1st May 2014 to 31st May 2014 to the actual time when the patient responded with the keyword or 'CANCEL'. Only reminders sent out 3 days prior to an appointment were taken into consideration whilst the others were removed from the analysis. The comparison drew a number of instances which helped us support our theory that text messaging is a powerful tool to remind patients that they have an appointment. Patient instinct on receiving a reminder will be to respond immediately or within few hours. Upon analysis a total of 58 out of 200 appointments were cancelled using the three-day rule.

Discussion

The chart below focuses on 58 cancellations generated by the practice in May 2014. The analysis shows that 71% cancelled their appointment within a day upon receiving the three-day reminder from the surgery. A further 10% of the cancellations where made 24-60 hours after receiving the reminder (and 10-18 hours before the scheduled appointment).

This analysis shows that over 80% of the SMS cancellations result in the freeing up of urgent GP appointments that reasonably can be reused. It confirms iPLATO's best practice guidelines of sending an appointment reminder 3 days before the appointment and switch on the Auto Cancel feature to maximise access to urgent GP appointment and minimise DNA.
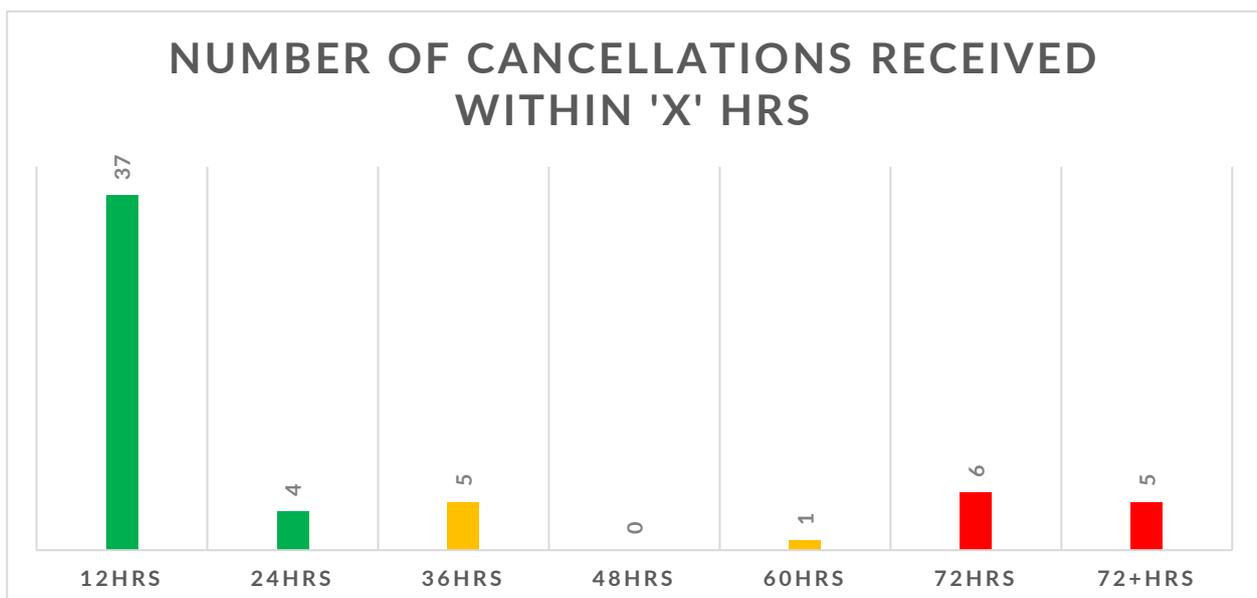
NUMBER OF CANCELLATIONS RECEIVED WITHIN 'X' HRS

Time	Value
12HRS	37
24HRS	4
36HRS	5
48HRS	0
60HRS	1
72HRS	6
72+HRS	5

Figure 1: Shows a comparison of the number of appointments cancelled by patients across various time frames

Conclusions

We can draw the following conclusions from the above analysis:

- Green: 71% (41 of 58) cancellations received within 24 hours from sending the reminder. These cancellations freed up urgent GP appointment slots (48 hours) for other patients.

- Amber: a further 10% of cancellations received 24-60 hours from sending the reminder. With appointments generally taking place between 70 and 78 hours after sending the reminder some of these cancellations may lead to freeing up an appointment to see a GP at very short notice.

- Red: the remaining 19% (11 of 58) of cancellations were made too close to the appointment time for the appointment to be reused for another patient. However, most of these patients showed good faith and made a reasonable effort, except…

- Naughty patients: only a very small percentage 5% (3 of 58) cancelled a just few minutes before (or, in two cases, after!) the appointment which then counted as a Did Not Attend (DNA).

Limitations

The main limitation of this study is the fact that it is extremely time consuming to study the cancellations across all 11 practices. In this case the sample size of 58 was quite small. However valid conclusions could be drawn which can now be utilised for other practices.