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## Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance regarding the management of patients who failed to attend their appointments. As well as being costly in financial terms, patients who fail to attend their agreed medical appointments often create excessive waiting times for other patients.

## Policy

In 2016, Dr Robert Varham, the then Head of General Practice Development at NHS England, published his *“Releasing Time for Care: 10 High Impact Actions for General Practice”*<sup>1</sup> of which “Reducing DNA” featured as being one of the areas that was needed to improve productivity. More recently, a [BBC news article dated 2 Jan 19](#) stated that patients who miss GP appointments are currently costing NHS England £216m a year, with data showing that more than 15 million consultations are being wasted because patients fail to show up<sup>2</sup> (DNA – did not attend).

The effects of DNA are:

- An increase in waiting times for patients who are unable to utilise these empty slots, resulting in the risk of worsening patients’ health
- A waste of practice time – not simply the clinicians’ time, but also the administration team’s as the appointment invariably needs to be rebooked
- Cost to the wider NHS in the requirement of additional clinicians

The practice monitors not-attended appointments on a regular basis and collects and publishes these statistics both in the waiting areas and online.

Appointments are marked DNA automatically by the clinical system after a session is complete, enabling the practice to keep accurate accounts of these numbers.

The practice takes preventative measures to reduce DNAs:

- We collect contact details of our patients. This way we are able to send them appointment reminders, which go out one day before their appointments.
- Since September 2019 these automatic reminders have gone out and after a trial period and patient feedback, we enabled a function that when a patient cancels their appointment via the reminder system, they get a confirmation message of the cancellation
- The patient can also get an ‘appointment card’ if they book their appointments in person, where the date and time of the appointment is clearly written.

## Managing DNA

In some occasions a patient will have a genuine reason for missing their appointments. The practice reminds patients to call to cancel their appointment if the reason is known in advance. Patients also have the option to cancel

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<sup>1</sup> [NHS England: Releasing Time for Care - 10 High Impact Actions for General Practice](#)

<sup>2</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-46732626](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-46732626)



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when they receive a text message reminder the day before. For patients with Online Access, cancellation is also possible.

The practice monitors DNA rate on a monthly basis and will write to the patients who have had three or more failed appointment attendances in the last quarter, explaining the impact of these missed appointments. Patients are invited to contact the practice manager if they would like to discuss the letter further.

### **Children who failed to attend**

Awareness is given to children who fail to attend an appointment. If a child has 3 missed appointments, the parent/guardian will be contacted directly to enquire about the reason. Our Safeguarding Children Policy will be taken in to consideration for regular child DNAs. Children who do not attend their routine immunisations appointments are sent reminder text messages.

### **Vulnerable patients who did not attend**

The practice recognises the importance of DNA for patients who might otherwise have difficulty in accessing the service and aims to encourage them to attend despite these difficulties.

We place special importance in following-up DNAs of patients belonging to the following groups:

- Mental Health problems
- Learning Disability
- Dementia
- Homeless
- Carers

### **Consistent DNA**

If a patient does not have a genuine reason for regular DNAs and continues missing appointments without explanation, the practice will write a second reminder letter.

The patient's access to Online Appointment Booking will be disabled.

The warning message will be placed on the patient's record and they will need to speak to a doctor on the phone before being given an appointment. This will ensure that the patient has access to healthcare and review, without the opportunity to waste another appointment.

### **Final measures**

If after these measures the patient fails to attend another appointment, the practice will consider it as a breakdown in relationship and will consider removing the patient from the practice list.