

176: A QUALITY IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVE TO REDUCE RATES OF NON-ATTENDANCE IN AN OUT PATIENT DEPARTMENT IN IRELAND

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Objective:

To increase public awareness of the problems associated with patients not attending for outpatient appointments and not informing the department.

Methods:

An audit was carried out in the outpatient department of the Midland Regional Hospital at Tullamore. The main aims of this audit were to investigate the rates and reasons why people did not attend for their appointments. The results from the audit showed that 10,451 patients did not attend for scheduled appointments in 2001. A sample of non-attenders (60) were surveyed by telephone interviews using a quantitative and qualitative questionnaire.

Results:

The results showed the general public's lack of awareness of the consequences of missing appointments, i.e.; waste of resources - doctors, nurses, clerical and specialist staff (Phlebotomist, technicians etc), adding to waiting lists, difficulty in securing another appointment and patients are putting their own health at risk.

One of the recommendations of this audit was to raise public awareness of these problems. A sub group decided upon a poster campaign in order to reach the general public. Time was spent looking at material produced by different organisations and lengthy discussion about the message that we wanted to get out to the general public. A print design company was enlisted to assist in the design of the poster. We decided to target the public by displaying the posters in the GP surgeries. Once the poster was agreed on by the sub-group and Health Board Managers, we then approached the primary care manager for his help in distributing the posters to the GP surgeries.

Conclusions:

The posters have been distributed through the primary care manager to the GP surgeries. The feedback from the GP's has been very positive, one GP commented that they themselves were unaware that so many appointments had been lost due to DNAs. More patients now contact the OPD Dept. to inform staff they cannot attend for their appointment. Improving communication between primary and secondary care and with the public can reduce DNA's and improve quality of OPD services by reducing waiting times for other patients.