



Dealing with Missed Appointments

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M E D I C A R E T A T E

A successful chiropractic program is not only dependent upon the doctor's understanding of the patient's clinical needs and application of a sound care plan, but also on the patient's commitment to their own care schedule. The easiest way to keep patients on schedule is to have them reschedule. The health needs of the patient are the basis for their schedule, and to keep the care plan on track, it is vitally important that missed appointments be made up. It is best to reschedule a missed appointment for the same day if possible.

While direct and forthright communications are always in order, you should be careful not to say that the patient "missed" their appointment as this is suggesting that the patient is in the wrong or has committed an offense that might change your approach to them personally or to their care. The patient should never be castigated as being wrong! There are some instances when the clinic schedule might be misleading. It may be that the patient is in the appointment book more than once or came in for an unscheduled treatment earlier. Always use caution in approaching this aspect of your relationship with the patient. When patients do not appear for their scheduled appointments, be prepared to accept their excuses, and not argue in any way, but work to facilitate the most rapid rescheduling. Remember, getting them back in is the goal.

Your staff, not you as the doctor, should be the contact point for all discussions regarding scheduling. It is not necessary for you to get involved in the day to day scheduling issues as it takes up valuable time and can place you in a context that could, in some instances, detract from your clinical relationship and the healing process. You are, however, still the doctor and your intervention may be necessary sometimes, but do so with good sense and not as a matter of routine, as in cases where the patient seems to question the need for care, perhaps on the advice of another provider, or has some other clinical reservation. Here are some points to consider and some possible responses on the part of the clinic staff:

Too Busy

The patient says he is too busy to take time to come in at all this week for a visit. He says he will call when things slow down.

CA: "I understand (pause). I know you are busy, but we would hate to see you lose the progress you've made so far. The doctor made recommendations for your visits to give you the maximum amount of correction. Why don't we schedule a consultation with the doctor? Maybe he can discuss a way to fit your visits with your schedule so it won't interrupt your progress. Can he call you at home tomorrow around noon?"

Sometimes the mere suggestion that the doctor will be calling them is enough to get the patient to come in. Their hesitation may mean that the patient is trying to see if you really believe in the series of care as much as discussed, or that they simply need to be reminded of their responsibility to their health. Being sincere but firm will get them back on track. The doctor should be notified if a patient is indecisive about their care.

Refusal to be Called

The patient says she missed her appointment because she has relatives coming into town and needs to run many errands before their arrival. She says she'll try to come in later in the week. She insists that your office NOT call her, she'll call you.

CA: "Mrs. Jones, would it be alright if the doctor gives you a call?"

If she says no, tell her nicely that you will give the message to the doctor. If this is the case, or if the doctor is unable to reach her by phone, you will need to release this patient by mail.

Forgot

Patient: "Oh, I forgot that I had an appointment today. There are too many things to keep track of!"

CA: "I understand. But don't forget how important it is to get your care. We'll set you up for tomorrow to make up for that lost appointment today, unless you can come in later this afternoon. If you do decide to come in today though, please don't forget."

No Transportation

Patient: "I got a flat tire and it's just been a big ordeal."

CA: "Well, we understand. We'll set you up for tomorrow to make up for that lost appointment today, unless you can come in later this afternoon. We don't want you to break down like your car did."

Discouraged Patient

Patient: "I don't think it's working for me. I don't feel any better than when I started."

CA: "Well, we need to understand further as to why you are not improving as quickly as you feel you should. Sometimes, after long periods of having these types of problems, it takes longer than usual for you to see results. We may further evaluate your care today when you come in for your adjustment. I will let the doctor know that you are not improving as quickly as you would like."

These are just a few possible scenarios, but the excuses can be very diverse and range from genuine conflicts to the most incredible and frankly unbelievable excuses. In the end, it is you educating the patient on the need for care, the nature of your care and the profound health implications of the chiropractic adjustment process that can help cut through the excuse process by instilling a sound understanding of the powerful clinical relevance of your care. In the end, like so many things in health care, education and understanding are your best tools to address scheduling problems and issues.

Charging for a Missed Office Visit

Missed patient appointments can disrupt your practice day, delay needed care and can have a direct impact on the income of your practice. You can charge a patient for a missed visit, but that information should be made clear and intelligible to every patient prior to their ever being a no-show. A clear

policy on missing appointments is in every practice's best interest, and deserves your attention and effort to develop and then communicate to your patients.

CMS Policy Regarding Missed Appointments

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services' (CMS) policy is to allow doctors and suppliers to charge Medicare beneficiaries for missed appointments, provided they do not discriminate against Medicare beneficiaries but also charge non-Medicare patients for missed appointments. The charge for a missed appointment is not a charge for a service itself (to which the assignment and limiting charge provisions apply), but rather is a charge for a missed business opportunity. Therefore, if a provider's missed appointment policy applies equally to all patients (Medicare and non-Medicare), then the Medicare law and regulations do not preclude the doctor from charging the Medicare patient directly.

The amount that the doctor charges for the missed appointment must apply equally to all patients (Medicare and non-Medicare), in other words, the amount the doctor charges Medicare beneficiaries for missed appointments must be the same as the amount that they charge non-Medicare patients (whatever amount that may be).

Medicare does not make any payments for missed appointment fees/charges that are imposed by providers, physicians, or other suppliers. Charges to beneficiaries for missed appointments should not be billed to Medicare. To download the CMS Manual section dealing with missed Medicare appointments go to: <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/Transmittals/downloads/R1279CP.pdf>.

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What Is MyMedicare.gov?

Described as "The official government site for People with Medicare," www.MyMedicare.gov is a free, secure online service for accessing Medicare information. As a registered user of this website, beneficiaries have access to personalized information regarding their Medicare benefits and services. www.MyMedicare.gov can be used to:

1. View claim status (excluding Part D claims)
2. Order a duplicate Medicare Summary Notice (MSN) or replacement Medicare card
 - View eligibility, entitlement and preventive services information
 - View enrollment information including prescription drug plans
 - View or modify your drug list and pharmacy information
 - View address of record with Medicare and Part B deductible status
 - Access online forms, publications and messages sent to you by CMS

In order to use this service, you must be a registered user and at present there are only 140,000 subscribers. The site also has a Spanish language option available.