

Case Study – Hull & East Yorkshire Women and Children’s Hospital

Mobile messaging service from Kingston Communications helps reduce missed appointments in hospital’s Paediatric Outpatients unit.

Background

Combining women’s and children’s services on one site, the £35m development has enabled the Trust to provide flexible, sensitive care of the highest standard to meet the diverse needs of the region’s women and their families.

The challenge

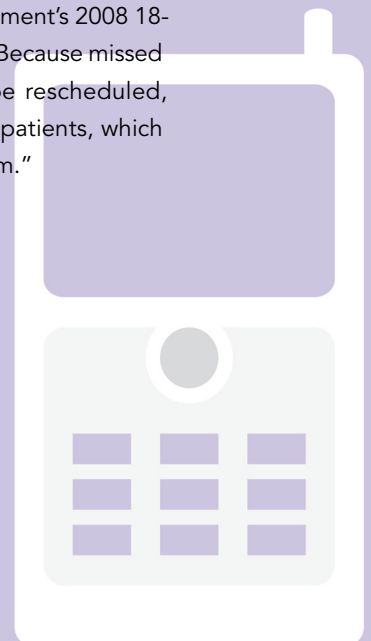
The Hospital’s Paediatric Outpatients unit provides specialist and general care to children who have been referred to its consultants.

While around 15,000 outpatient appointments are scheduled by the unit each year, over 20 per cent of these are not attended by the patients, something that the Hospital’s Paediatric Services Manager, Jackie Timson, clearly recognises as an issue to be addressed: “There are lots of reasons why missed outpatients appointments are a concern to us, the most important one being the health and wellbeing of the child,” she says.

“First and foremost, we want to ensure that the children under our medical care are receiving the attention and treatment they need to recover fully from any health problems they have experienced.

“A further concern for us is the financial impact of missed appointments as the PCTs do not fund missed appointments. This represents a significant loss to the potential income to the Trust.”

Finally, in common with all areas of the NHS, the unit is constantly striving to maximise its resources so that it can improve the service it offers to the community. Jackie Timson explains: “One of our aims is reduce the length of time between a patient being referred into the service to receiving treatment, in line with the Government’s 2008 18-week referral to treatment target. Because missed appointments usually need to be rescheduled, the end result is delays for other patients, which makes it harder to achieve this aim.”



The solution

One of the measures the Paediatric Services unit has introduced to try to reduce the number of missed outpatient appointments is a text messaging reminder service. For the past six months the unit has been piloting Kingston Communications' Business Messaging service, which allows staff to send a text message to the parents of outpatients several days before their appointment to remind them to attend.

Of a sample of patients who were asked whether or not they would be happy to receive this type of reminder, over 90 per cent said they would like to, reflecting that in many cases, patients simply forget that they have a forthcoming appointment.

The software supplied by KC allows text messages to be sent quickly and easily from a PC, either in bulk or to individual telephone numbers.

The benefits

Jackie Timson believes that reminding patients of appointments via the messaging service is playing a valuable part in reducing the number of missed appointments at the unit:

"During the last three months, we've experienced a noticeable drop in the number of patients who haven't attended appointments," she says.

"Because we're continually introducing new initiatives to bring the number of missed appointments down, it's difficult to say how much of this improvement can be attributed to the reminder system and how much to other activities we're undertaking, such as changing the way we book appointments in the first place.

"However, because improving the health and wellbeing of children is so important, we need to use the full range of tools at our disposal to address the problem of missed appointments. As most people have mobile phones these days, this is an obvious method for us to employ.

"In some cases it's unavoidable that an appointment will be missed, but because we include the telephone number of the unit in the reminder we send, patients can call to let us know if they're not able to attend and in many cases we can allocate their slot to another patient, which is a further advantage of the system.

"Now that the pilot has ended, the challenge going forward is to capture as many mobile phone numbers as we can and integrate the messaging software with our appointments booking system to make the process much more streamlined."

Pete Dunn, Senior Account Manager at KC, comments: "Within the commercial sector, where missed appointments mean lost revenue, many businesses have taken advantage of rising mobile phone usage to remind customers of forthcoming appointments via text messages. Missed appointments within the NHS can have significant health implications as well as financial consequences, so it's logical for its departments to make use of available technology to address this issue."

To find out more about **KC Business Messaging**,
please call **0800 915 5511**, email us business.sales@kcom.com
or visit www.kingstoncommunications.com

