

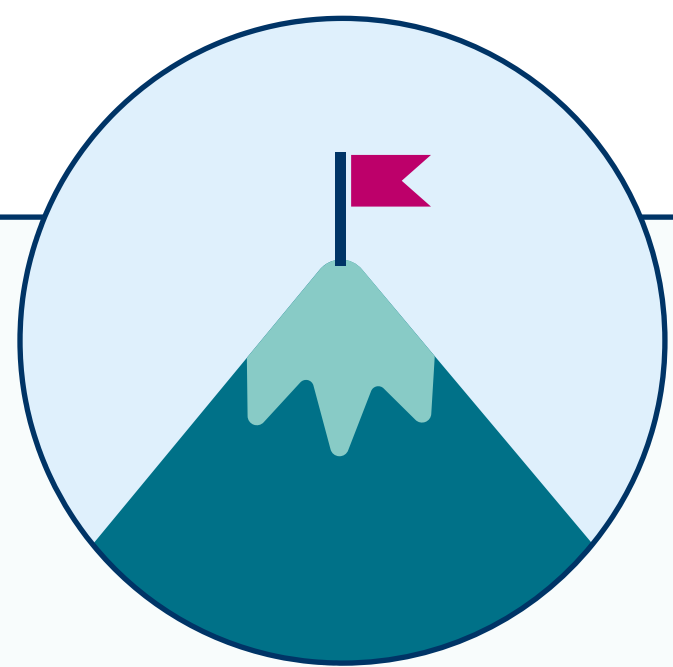
Service Pressure in Diagnostic Ultrasound: “Doing more” is not the answer Improving efficiency whilst protecting sonographers’ wellbeing

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Aim

To modernise administration processes in imaging departments to minimise “did not attend” (DNA) rates in order to maximise efficiency whilst avoiding the practice of overbooking ultrasound lists.



Methods

Patient focused booking (PFB) commenced in Ultrasound in January 2023. Patients received an invitation to call to arrange an appointment within 72 hours. In March 2023, two questions were added to the invitation letter to avoid unnecessary scanning and/or duplication of work.

Patients were asked to inform administration staff at the time of booking if they had already had a scan (ultrasound or other modality) or had surgery since the original request was submitted. If the answer to either of the questions was yes, staff contacted a member of the sonography team to reassess the request for justification.

A survey was developed and sent to 14 Health Boards to consider administration processes around outpatient ultrasound booking and their associated DNA rates. Information around use of text confirmation(s), patient focused booking and short notice cancellation lists was collated and correlated alongside DNA rates.

Results

Introduction of patient focused booking in January 2023 showed DNA rates to reduce from 6.6% in September 2022 to 4.8% in February 2023. Introduction of two questions regarding interim imaging and / or surgery in March 2023 resulted in DNA rates reducing to 3.8% in May 2023.

11/14 boards responded to the survey. One board used patient focused booking and 5 used text reminders. Four used a short notice cancellation list. DNA rates varied from < 4% to 12% with an average rate of 7.3%. A clear association was identified between lower DNA rates and use of text reminders. However, this was strongly evident when coupled with patient focused booking.



Discussion

Overbooking lists undoubtedly causes sonographer stress in the workplace. AXREM (2022) note such practice results in increased workforce stress, sickness and attrition. As a result, patient care will suffer by making it more difficult to accommodate those who may be referred urgently at short notice.

Advice has previously been available from BMUS and SOR on how radiology services (including ultrasound) can be designed and managed to deliver high-quality and efficient services, avoid a mismatch between capacity and demand, and improve flow. If this is not done effectively it can lead to situations where inadequate times are allowed for examinations and unacceptable practices.

Patient focused booking as described has been shown to be extremely effective in reducing DNA rates. This requires significant investment in administration staff but will without doubt save money whilst protecting the workforce. When compared to the cost implications of outsourcing to improve capacity, outlay in administration provides excellent value for money. Overbooking of lists lead to complaints, compounding the stresses involved in managing the overbooked list.

PFB avoids duplication of work and unnecessary scanning. Ultrasound services who are experiencing problems with patients not attending their appointments, being managed using other methods, such as choice of booking for a patient at a time convenient for them, pre-appointment telephone calls or reminder text messaging, has been shown to be highly effective in considerably minimising DNA. Therefore, capacity is improved and patients attending for their appointments are not penalised by having to wait to be seen.

Next Steps

Introducing a combination of patient focused booking and text reminders is being considered locally as a way of reducing DNA rates further. Sharing this best practice nationally may improve patient pathways in general and supports the ‘Realistic Medicine’ ethos.

For more information, please contact: nhsscotlandacademy@nhs.scot

- **Ultrasound examination times and appointments | SoR**
- **2021_SoR_and_BMUS_guidelines_v1.0_.pdf**
- **Service Pressure in Diagnostic Imaging - AXREM**