

# A Success Story...

## SMS REMINDER SYSTEM

Access: Shape the handling of demand

### Brighton Family and Women's Clinic - VIC

**B**righton Family and Women's Clinic frequently experienced a large number of 'fail to attend' patients, due to booking in advance. The Practice Manager contacted billing software provider (Zedmed) to install a SMS reminder system and purchase bulk SMS. Staff were diligent in obtaining and checking patient's mobile phone numbers at reception.

A one month trial began on the 1<sup>st</sup> August 2006. At the end of the trial FTA's had decreased by 90 patients which was a huge improvement.



### Context

**B**righton Family and Women's Clinic is a RRMA 1 practice located in suburban South East Melbourne (considered an affluent area). The practice has 12 GPs (7 FTE), one Practice Manager, three Practice Nurses, a psychologist, and 13 support staff who work at the practice. There are approximately 23,000 patients on the data base who are mostly elderly, young families and women.

### The Situation

**B**righton Family and Women's Clinic frequently experienced a large number of 'fail to attend' patients, due to booking in advance. An audit of 'fail to attend' numbers for the month of March 2006 found that 150 patients failed to attend for their appointments.

The Practice Manager was determined to improve the 'fail to attend' rate, and thus investigated various methods to improve patient attendance. A SMS reminder system was deemed the best way to do this. The practice would trial for three months then complete another audit and if successful would continue indefinitely.

### The Change

**T**he Practice Manager contacted billing software provider, Zedmed, to find out how to install SMS reminder system. This is an inbuilt feature of the program but needs to be set up. A staff meeting was conducted to discuss implementation and the focus was to obtain and check patient's mobile phone numbers at reception.

"The SMS reminder system has proven a very cost effective approach for improving patient attendance."

### The Change *continued...*

Staff were asked to communicate to patients in the following way:

“We are trialling a new SMS reminder system for the month of August. Are you happy to receive a reminder for your appointments?”

The practice also set up account with SMS central to purchase bulk SMS at a cost of 25 cents per SMS. The practice also needed to alter the patient registration form on Zedmed to request permission to send an SMS. They set the date to commence 1<sup>st</sup> August 2006.

The practice tested SMS reminders on the Practice Manager and staff to check the message, speed and accuracy. In the first week of the trial they only sent a few per day to ensure all went smoothly. During this process they identified and fixed a few minor problems including patients who booked outside of normal booking times, ensuring staff ticked the appropriate boxes and one patient who replied to SMS as the facility was not available. Then the SMS reminder system went full steam ahead.

### The Outcome

**T**he Practice Manager completed another audit at the end of August 2006 and was very pleased to see a huge improvement in ‘fail to attends’ (60 – a decrease of 90). There has also been a decrease on confirmation phone calls for double appointments.

An average of 15 reminders per day occur and is growing as staff remember to ask patients for mobile numbers and their permission to send reminders. It has proven to be a very cost effective approach for improving patient attendance.

Figure 1 - Cost effectiveness of SMS system

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	COST or SAVING per month
SMS Purchase	250 SMS calls	\$62.50 (25 cents each)
Reduction in confirmation phone calls for long consultations	Cut down by approx 10 calls per day	\$40 saving plus time spent
Reduction in FTA's	90 x \$55	\$4950 saving
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$4940 saving</b>

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