

To get patients in the door, try texting

By Betsy Vereckey | September 13, 2016

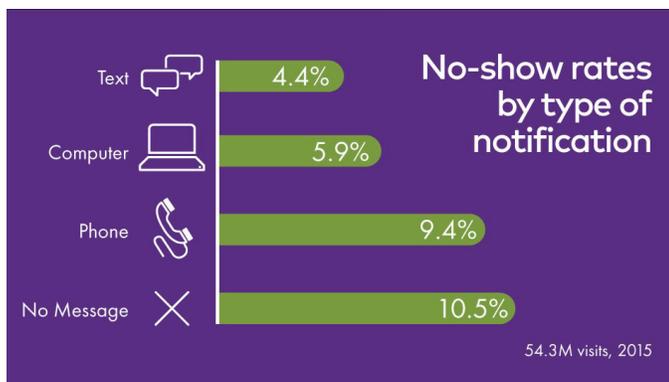
No one likes being stood up, but that's what a lot of Americans do when they can't make – or face – a doctor's appointment. For medical organizations, those missed visits add up to lost productivity and a drain on the bottom line. By one estimate, the inefficiencies of missed appointments cost the healthcare industry about \$150 billion per year.

So providers are doing everything they can to cut down on costly no-shows, from implementing cancellation fees to automatically charging credit cards on file to sending out multiple email reminders. They're asking staff to leave voicemail messages. And in some cases, they're sending automatic text messages.

That last tactic turns out to be the most effective.

When researchers from athenahealth examined more than 54.3 million visits from 2015, across a range of specialties nationwide, they found that 10.5 percent of patients who don't get reminders don't come to their doctors' appointments. A phone call reduced the volume of no-shows a bit, to 9.4 percent.

But a text message – still fairly uncommon as a medical-office best practice – worked best. Only 4.4 percent of patients who got texts from their providers didn't show up – which means medical offices might want to invest in unlimited data plans. (Ohai! C u 2day @ 4.)





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