

# Appointment Punctuality Policy

## Table of contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
1.1	Policy statement	2
1.2	Status	2
<b>2</b>	<b>Policy</b>	<b>2</b>
2.1	Patient responsibility	2
2.2	Management of late arrivals	2
2.3	Management of waiting patients	3
2.4	Recording of information	3
2.5	Patient awareness	3
2.6	Clinic lateness	4
<b>3</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>4</b>

# 1 Introduction

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## 1.1 Policy statement

Sometimes, patients will be late to appointments at Binfield Road Surgery due to things beyond their control. It is inevitable. However, this document provides guidance on managing patients who do not attend an appointment or who miss appointments on multiple occasions.

This policy is to be read in conjunction with the [Did Not Attend \(DNA\) Policy](#).

## 1.2 Status

The organisation aims to create policies that meet the diverse needs of our service and workforce. They must not disadvantage anyone, as per the [Equality Act 2010](#). Consideration has been given to the impact this policy might have with regard to the individual protected characteristics of those to whom it applies.

This document and any procedures contained within it are non-contractual and may be modified or withdrawn at any time. For the avoidance of doubt, it does not form part of your contract of employment. Also, this document applies to all employees and others, like agency workers, locums, and contractors, who perform functions related to the practice.

# 2 Policy

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## 2.1 Patient responsibility

Under the [NHS Constitution](#), patients should:

“Please keep appointments or cancel within a reasonable time. Receiving treatment within the maximum waiting times may be compromised unless you do.” It is both courteous and expected that patients inform this organisation if they will be late. They should do so as soon as possible.

Some patients arrive and take a seat in the waiting room. They assume there's no need to 'book in'. A self-check-in poster is available [here](#). It reminds patients to use the self-check-in screen upon arrival.

## 2.2 Management of late arrivals

To stick to the appointment schedule and serve all patients well, we should manage late arrivals as follows:

- **Less than ten minutes late** – staff will:
  - Mark the patient as having arrived, advising them that the clinician may already be seeing the next patient.
  - Explain that the patient will be seen after the clinician has finished with their current patient.

- If appropriate, remind the patient of the importance of attending appointments on time.
- **More than ten minutes late** – staff will advise the patient that they have missed their appointment and offer the following as appropriate:
  - Offer the patient an appointment later during that session or that day (if an appointment is available).
  - Discuss the patient with the clinician and, if in agreement, and the patient is willing to wait, advise that they will be seen at the end of that session. The patient should be made aware that this may be some time.
  - Should the above option not be possible, the patient should rebook for another appointment.

It is at the clinician's discretion whether to see the patient. There may be a valid reason for being late, so each case will be considered. If there is a clinical need, the clinician will advise the staff on the appropriate actions.

Ordinarily, clinicians are to be informed only via a screen message.

### 2.3 Management of waiting patients

If staff note a patient has waited over 20 minutes, they should apologise for the delay and explain the reason. The clinician might be late due to patients sometimes needing more than the 10-minute slot. Or, there may be an admin error.

Should the latter be the case, then the administration team should advise the clinician of this and confirm that the patient did not arrive late for their appointment. Every effort should then be made to ensure that the patient is seen in sequential order rather than being offered a later appointment.

If this happens often, management will consider an audit and extra training.

Should any patient have waited for more than 20 minutes then this should be investigated. This is often because the clinic is running behind. Sometimes, it may be that the patient forgot to check in or that the reception team failed to book the patient as having arrived.

To further assist, a 'Sorry to keep you waiting' poster is available [here](#).

### 2.4 Recording of information

Admin staff must note the outcome of the discussion with the clinician about patients who are more than ten minutes late. Also, all staff must use the correct [SNOMED CT code](#). This will enable accurate searches and help monitor patients who are often late for appointments.

SNOMED code Late for appointment (finding) SCTID: 401278005 should be used

### 2.5 Patient awareness

If a patient is late and the appointment is cancelled, it is a "Did not attend." The appointment could not be reused. The patient may, however, still expect to be seen later. This will cause longer waits for all patients.

To assist with patient understanding of the DNA problem, the following posters are available:

- [3 reasons not to miss your appointment](#)
- [Did not attend information](#)

Further reading on patients missing appointments is in the [Did Not Attend \(DNA\) Policy](#). It includes actions for missed adult and child appointments, with letters.

The posters in this policy can be used as a patient awareness tool within the organisation or on the website.

Suzete Shah Abreu, Reception Manager will update the DNA rates poster on a monthly basis.

## **2.6 Clinic lateness**

The organisation is committed to running on schedule. If not, patients will be informed as soon as possible about the reasons and the expected delay. Reasons for delay may be, but are not limited to:

- Medical emergencies.
- Complex routine appointments overrunning.
- Delay in staff arriving due to external factors beyond their control.
- Administrative error by a patient or staff member.

In all cases, reception staff will advise patients accordingly.

Occasionally a patient may suggest that they want to make a complaint following an overrunning clinic. Should they wish to do so, then the [Complaints Procedure](#) should be referred to.

## **3 Summary**

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Appointment punctuality ensures that the organisation remains on schedule and that patients are seen on time. It is accepted that emergencies and complex cases may cause delays. However, this is an unusual event, with unforeseeable timing.

Staff should encourage patients to attend their appointments on time. This will help the organisation run smoothly and avoid wasted appointments.