

Can non-attendance at hospital outpatients be reduced by giving patients a copy of their referral letter?

Submission date 23/01/2004	Recruitment status No longer recruiting	☐ Prospectively registered
		☐ Protocol
Registration date 23/01/2004	Overall study status Completed	☐ Statistical analysis plan
		☒ Results
Last Edited 18/11/2010	Condition category Other	☐ Individual participant data

Plain English summary of protocol

Not provided at time of registration

Contact information

Type(s)

Scientific

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Additional identifiers

Protocol serial number

PSI A-63

Study information

Scientific Title

Study objectives

Despite waiting lists, approximately 12% of people do not attend their hospital outpatient appointment (new and follow-up). A pilot randomised study of 171 consecutive new referrals from two general practitioners suggested that a simple device - sending them a copy of their referral letter - markedly reduced the proportion of non-attenders, from 6% in the control group to zero in their intervention group. The aim of this research is to try and confirm this finding in a wider sample of general practitioners and their populations.

1. The attempt to reduce non-attendance by a primary care intervention as opposed to all previous work which has applied secondary care interventions.
2. The innovation of sending patients routinely a copy of their referral letter.

Ethics approval required

Old ethics approval format

Ethics approval(s)

Not provided at time of registration

Primary study design

Interventional

Study design

Randomised controlled trial

Study type(s)

Not Specified

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied

Not applicable

Interventions

All general practitioners in Exeter city (n=71) except one on sabbatical and one of the authors (WH), were invited to participate. Forty-four showed an interest, of whom 26, representing 13 of the 19 practices, were selected using a random numbers table. All 2078 referrals to consultants in the two local trusts between January and May, 1997 were eligible.

Intervention Type

Other

Phase

Not Specified

Primary outcome(s)

The main outcome measure was the number of non-attendances at new outpatient appointments, either as a first time non-attendance, or non-attendance at a rearranged appointment. Attendances were monitored by two methods. The general practitioners' records were examined by WH, while blinded to copy/control status, for written replies from the hospital team. Deaths and hospital admissions were documented. Notes of patients who died were obtained from the North and East Devon Health Authority, who also provided details of the new general practitioner when patients had changed practices. The new general practitioner extracted attendance data from their records. The general practitioner is not routinely notified

of cancellations, and some departments do not notify a first non-attendance. For these hospital data was used. The large majority of consultant referrals from Exeter general practitioners are to the Royal Devon and Exeter Healthcare Trust. All outpatient appointment outcomes are coded in the hospital Patient Activity System as attendance, cancellation or non-attendance. In addition to finding cancellations and unnotified non-attendances, this dataset was compared with attendance data from the general practitioner's notes. Non-attendance rates for study and non-study general practitioners before, during and after the trial were calculated, to assess the representativeness of study general practitioners.

Key secondary outcome(s)

Not provided at time of registration

Completion date

01/12/1998

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria

All new referrals to all consultant specialities.

Participant type(s)

Patient

Healthy volunteers allowed

No

Age group

Not Specified

Sex

Not Specified

Key exclusion criteria

Termination of pregnancy; referral letters which might distress the patient; inability to read.

Date of first enrolment

01/12/1996

Date of final enrolment

01/12/1998

Locations

Countries of recruitment

United Kingdom

England

Study participating centre
Barnfield Hill Surgery
Exeter
United Kingdom
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Sponsor information

Organisation

Record Provided by the NHS R&D 'Time-Limited' National Programme Register - Department of Health (UK)

Funder(s)

Funder type

Government

Funder Name

NHS Primary and Secondary Care Interface National Research and Development Programme

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

IPD sharing plan summary

Not provided at time of registration

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Results article	results	22/05/1999		Yes	No