



## An Excerpt from Dr. Levin's Book **Power Cell Scheduling™**

### How to Reduce Last-Minute Cancellations and No-Shows

#### Reducing Cancellations & No-Shows

Cancellations and no-shows can be a major problem in one practice and not a problem at all in another. The reason? Patient training. Patients **MUST** understand that cancellations are not acceptable. Everyone on the staff must transmit this philosophy to patients.

Before fully developing this policy, it may be helpful to evaluate the number of cancellations and no-shows the practice has been experiencing based on office tracking. If the practice is fully committed to optimal comprehensive care, then a single doctor with one hygienist should have a goal of less than 2% cancellations.

We have found that most offices report that patients are more likely to cancel a hygiene visit than a doctor visit. This means that patients may have a lower value for hygiene visits than doctor services. Assess whether the cancellations occur on the answering machine or through the answering service. Patients who want to cancel can be evasive and often do not want to talk to anyone for fear they may be talked out of canceling. This data is exactly why offices should evaluate when cancellation calls occur. If they are coming in "after hours," it means that the patients do not want to talk to you.

If you do receive a fair number of cancellations on the machine and/or answering service, you may want to do the following:

1. Tell the service not to accept cancellations and that the patient must call in and speak to someone to re-schedule.
2. Do not allow the answering machine to take messages. If it is an emergency, leave a special number (this is rarely abused). It is too easy for the patients just to tell the machine that they are not coming in.

It is always better for the patient to speak directly with someone on staff so that specific verbal skills can be used to discourage cancellations. Again, cancellations are another reason to confirm 48 hours in advance.

#### Attempting to Reduce Cancellations & No-Shows Before They Occur Through Re-training

Do you have appointment cards that say? "If you are unable to keep this appointment, please call us 24 hours in advance to reschedule." If you do, throw them away. We do not advocate 24-hour's notice because it is simply not enough time. Instead, develop appointment cards with the following statement:

*"The schedule is the engine that drives practice production. Without an efficient schedule, practices will have difficulty reaching production goals and enjoying a low-stress environment."*

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*"If for any reason you cannot keep this appointment,  
please call our office at least 48 hours in advance.  
There will be a fee for missed appointments."*

When the patient is scheduling for the next appointment, the Scheduling Coordinator should place the card on the desk and circle the statement about the 48-hour notice with a red pen. The entire scenario should go this way:

1. Scheduling Coordinator fills out appointment card.
2. Scheduling Coordinator starts to hand the appointment card to the patient, but produces a red pen.
3. Scheduling Coordinator asks the patient, "If for any reason you cannot keep this appointment will you please call me at least 48 hours in advance?"
4. Scheduling Coordinator simultaneously places the appointment card on the desk and circles that area.

### Scripting

*Scheduling Coordinator: I know that Dr. Smith was concerned about (name area or situation). In fact, at the meeting this morning he was mentioning that he was happy to see that you were on the schedule because he was concerned about (name area or situation) and we do not have an open appointment for more than a month. Is there any way that we can work it out so that you can make it in?*

Patients always want to know what's in it for them. If they perceive a benefit (i.e., the doctor is concerned) they may change their mind. If the patient cannot be convinced to keep the appointment:

*Scheduling Coordinator: Let's go ahead now and reschedule.*

1. If the patient does not reschedule, the doctor should receive this information at the next morning meeting for further follow-up.
2. Someone other than the patient calls to cancel a patient's appointment. If appropriate, attempt to reschedule at this time — "Let's go ahead and reschedule now." If it is not possible to reschedule the patient, the Scheduling Coordinator should make a note in the schedule to contact the patient within the next day. Always document conversation and pull up all patients' names in the computer when they call! This is done so that you can check their history. After all, they may be a chronic canceller.
3. Reducing cancellations: First, the office must always work on re-training the patient. Always create value for the service which the patient will undergo. This approach does not work for all patients, however. Some will still need a bit more re-training. The first missed appointment begins the re-training process. The threat of a charge usually makes people reconsider.

*Scheduling Coordinator: Mrs. Smith, as you know there is a fee for a missed appointment. However, I know that Dr. Jones would allow me to not charge you this time.*

Once the patient continues this behavior, she is treated as a "Broken Appointment Patient."

### Summary of Handling Cancellations

Changing patients' behavior takes time. The doctor and the team must always reinforce the importance of treatment to the patient. The Scheduling Coordinator needs to make it clear to patients, in a nice way, that last minute cancellations and no-shows are not acceptable behavior.