



# Flash of brilliance

Completed by: Julie Clarke

Service: Children's Hearing Service



Kent Community Health

NHS Foundation Trust

## Aim: What were you trying to achieve?

Previously, if an appointment became available due to a patient cancellation, parents and carers were contacted by phone, on an individual basis, by the admin team, to re-offer the appointment. Parents and carers would not always answer the phone due to it being a withheld number. This resulted in repetitive messages being left on answerphones requesting the parent or carer to return call on the contact details left. When the carer or patient returned the call, there was additional time spent by the admin team dealing with returned calls. This approach to filling appointments became labour intensive and consuming for individual admin members. The aim was to utilise the text messaging service available to Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust (KCHFT) colleagues, to reduce admin time spent phoning individual parents to fill cancelled appointments, to increase clinic utilisation and be more responsive in utilising last minute and often on the day cancellations.

## Change ideas: What changes did you make?

The admin team made a change to the process. Instead of calling six parents and potentially leaving six answerphone messages, they send a text message to a group of six to 10 patients taken from the various waiting lists, suitable for the appointment type, informing them that an appointment has become available, on a first come first served basis. The text message sent to parents informed them of the date and location, to stop any misunderstandings and to avoid them turning up at the location without contacting the admin office to confirm the booking and follow the normal booking process. Once the appointment has been accepted by a patient and booked, a further text is sent out to the same group of parents to let them know the appointment is no longer available.

## Measures/results: What was the impact of the changes?

The team collected data by keeping an appointment log of all appointments filled in the time period of 9 February 2023 until 3 March 2023 (17 working days).

In total the team used this method to utilise 22 appointments. They successfully filled 16 appointment slots with respondents from the text.

In total 124 messages were sent for all 22 appointments (between four and six text messages sent per appointment). This created an overall response rate of 34 to the text messages.

The process of sending out texts to filled appointments was responsive, with all 16 appointments filled and confirmed on the same day, with five of the appointments being for the same day or next day.

The team has noticed the following benefits.

- This approach enables the team to be more proactive in filling slots and helps to maximise their clinic utilisation.
- They spend less time calling individual patients, leaving basic answerphone messages to unanswered phone calls.
- They have seen a reduction in unanswered calls as Parents receive text and know immediately who is trying to contact them, as many do not answer 'unidentified' callers.
- There is an increase in uptake for last minutes cancellations, as there is a faster response from the parents and carers who are able to attend the last-minute appointment, so a greater potential to fill on the day cancellations.
- Reduction in the number of calls to the office replying to generic answerphone messages and reduction in admin time spent dealing with these, allowing the team to focus on other duties.
- Booking process is spread across the whole team, rather than one person, so their competing work demands can be met.

## Lessons learned and what's next?

The admin and clinical colleagues are now looking at how they can utilise the text messaging service further. This will potentially include:

- Extending text message service to support to the management and booking of virtual support groups.
- Assisting in filling short notice appointments, due to additional weekend capacity being added.
- Sending reminders of booked assessments to reduce was not brought (WNB).
- Sending additional confirmation for appointments booked verbally over the telephone and at short notice.
- Extending text message service to confirm waiting list acceptance.
- Exploring further use of text messaging service, to send out bulk information to cohort of parents.
- Texting out links for pre-appointment questionnaires for new referrals and hearing aid patients.