

COMMUNICATING WITH PATIENTS

An SMS text message strategy can deliver real cost savings and dramatically improve work flow efficiency for healthcare organisations

MANY HEALTHCARE ORGANISATIONS

are now incorporating text messaging into the way they communicate with patients. Hospitals, clinics, GP surgeries, smoking cessation, sexual health and the National Chlamydia Screening Program are all feeling the benefit.

It is widely known that text messaging is socially and digitally inclusive, over 98 per cent of UK adults now have a mobile phone. Many organisations are adopting simple to use interfaces from companies such as txttools.co.uk. This service allows the user to send and receive SMS text messages from their computer and track the delivery, much like e-mail, but with audited delivery. Having the ability to create discreet groups of clients, patients or staff can have major benefits when you want everyone to be notified with a single message.

KEY AREAS

In healthcare txttools is used in four key areas: sending out test results, reminding patients of appointments, nurse bank and general staff communications, and for public health campaigns. The txttools system works standalone on the Internet and data can be uploaded from any existing clinical management system, additionally txttools has been integrated 'seamlessly' within many clinical systems.

In our experience there are a few key issues in healthcare that are simple to fix. Missed appointments cost the NHS millions of pounds every year – simple appointment reminders by text message cost pennies and are proven to work. Not getting timely results back when patients have been tested,

causes untold anxiety for the patient and increases pressure on frontline staff. Test results can be sent instantly by text with 100 per cent satisfaction, we can prove it.

Organisations are choosing txttools for a number of key reasons, including the fact that an unlimited number of contacts can be stored and unlimited numbers of messages can be sent, messages can be scheduled to arrive hours, days or weeks before an appointment or at anytime in the future. Contacts can be uploaded from any existing system. txttools offers unlimited support where help is less than a three-ring telephone call away. Two way messaging allows patients to cancel and rearrange. This really is simple to use, clever technology.

Working in partnership with one of the leading Sexual Health System suppliers Mill Systems, txttools is fully embedded within the MillCare system delivering automated results and appointment reminders by text. Mill Systems are currently in the process of developing SMS further with txttools and will soon be offering clinics two-way messaging with the option for patients to book appointments by text anytime of day using an automated appointment booking system – a truly innovative solution to tackling the issues of sexually transmitted diseases – giving patients access to clinic appointments 24/7 (www.millsystems.com).

24/7 ACCESS

"We put ourselves in the shoes of our target audience and quickly recognised SMS text messaging met the needs of young people.

Providing 24/7 access to request a do-it-yourself screening kit via a simple text message works," says Judith Ralphs, Chlamydia Screening Programme Coordinator, Worcestershire PCT.

"Text messaging has delivered dramatic results for the Bradshaw Clinic and has reduced DNA rates by almost 50 per cent in its first month. We recognised that tackling the issues of missed appointments would also offer direct cost savings, avoiding wasted clinical sessions and reducing the risks associated with a break in patients' medication because they forgot to attend their appointment. We have had an overwhelming response from our patients, who think text reminders are great and make them feel cared for. Some of the comments we have received to date include: 'It's fantastic – why has no one thought of this before' and 'I almost forgot my appointment until I received your text – thank u'," says James Sutherland, manager of the Bradshaw Clinic in Derby.

"Desktop messaging is quick and easy to use, I really like the ability to send results instantly to any sized group. As you can imagine patients are anxious about test results and they want them as soon as possible. Using meditxt we can get results out to all mobiles within minutes of getting test results back from the lab," commented Liz Dearden, Chlamydia, screening coordinator, Leicester City PCT.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Case studies can be viewed at:

<https://www.txttools.co.uk/preloginjsp/txttools/healthcare.jsp>

