



450% Return on investment generated. Leading to an additional income of **£100,000** in payment by results in just **6 months**.

Formed in April 1991, the Trust provides a full range of acute healthcare services at Whiston Hospital and St Helens Hospital.

The Trust offers an excellent standard of care to a population of some 350,000 people. In addition, the Mersey Regional Burns and Plastic Surgery Unit, located at Whiston Hospital, serves a population of over four million.

The Challenge

In April 2007, to reduce the impact of DNA (Did Not Attend) rates, St Helens and Knowsley Hospitals NHS Trust conducted a pilot to investigate the effectiveness of calling patients to remind them about their appointment. Reminder calls were made for four specialties by Trust staff. Resource constraints meant the pilot was limited to new appointments only.

The results from the internal trial were encouraging, with DNA rates reducing from 10.3% to 8.3%. However, using staff to make reminder calls highlighted several issues for a Trust-resourced reminder service. For example, staff were not dedicated to making calls and had insufficient time available to contact all patients. Further, calling during the day meant that many patients were not contactable, resulting in wasted staff time. The Trust realised that to extend beyond the numbers called in the pilot, a partnership with an experienced reminder service provider would be needed.

The Solution

Having evaluated the range of services available, the Trust selected Chronos, the multi-media Appointment Confirmation Service from ERS Connect, to conduct an extended pilot. The new trial would include follow-up as well as new outpatient appointments, covering all of the Trust's key specialties. Chronos was selected for the pilot due to its ability to blend Automated Interactive Voice Response (IVR) and Live Agent calls to deliver a high volume of reminders.

The Achievements and Benefits

Calls made by Live Agent are a key element in providing a service which is both accessible to, and appropriate for, all patient groups. Paul Williams, Head of Patient Access, points out, "We had been considering an IVR only service but believed that one which would include agents would provide a better service for our older patients."

This decision proved to be an important one and contributed to the success of the extended pilot. The benefits delivered by Chronos to patients, as well as to Trust staff, were both immediate and measurable.

Effective Healthcare Communications

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Reduced DNA Rates

Patients who fail to attend their appointment (Did Not Attends) waste valuable clinician time, appointment slot capacity, lengthen waiting lists and generate extra work for clinicians and administration staff. Worse still, under Payment by Results (PbR), DNA rates also affect Trust income. The Chronos service proved to be effective immediately. The Trust experienced huge DNA rate reductions, in each of the four specialties engaged in the pilot, of between 24% and 79%.

Further, during the six month pilot alone, the service generated around £100,000 of extra PbR income for the Trust. This represents an additional £4.50 of net additional income for every pound invested in the service: a massive 450% return on investment.

“We have improved continuity of care for patients, generated increased income for the Trust and reduced the time wasted on the management of DNA rates.”

Paul Williams
Head of Patient Access

Key Features

- Blend of Live Agent Calls, Automated (IVR) Calls, Emails and SMS Messaging to maximise capacity and income within NHS Trusts, across the UK
- Fully managed service, working securely over the N3 network
- No capital investment, with low service costs

Delivers

- Reduced DNAs
- Maximised slot utilisation, reducing waiting lists
- Improved cash releasing efficiency savings
- Increased income, through Payment by Results
- Improved patient access to care

Maximum Patient Contact

This dramatic reduction in DNA rates was achieved, in part, through the development by ERS Connect and the Trust of a sophisticated calling plan that allowed several attempts to be made to contact patients over a four night period. The intent of this call plan was to reduce any cause of anxiety or feeling of harassment amongst patients and, as a result, improve the success rate of completed calls.

Patients aged under 65 receive an Automated call, while patients aged 65 and over would receive a call from a Live Agent. If a patient failed to complete an Automated call twice, then the next call would come from an agent, ensuring maximum contact and completion rates.

This call plan has been extremely effective, successfully confirming over 85% of all patient appointments. Importantly, Live Agent calls account for 40% of the successful reminders that would not have been completed otherwise.

Patient Confidentiality

The team at ERS Connect and Trust staff also worked closely together to develop IVR and Agent call scripts that were not only easy for patients to understand but which also strictly maintained patient confidentiality.

Patient confidentiality is a key concern of the Trust, regarding both the method of data transfer used, as well as stewardship of the data itself. The Trust reviewed security provisions both within ERS Connect and the Chronos service and was pleased to find that they adhere to NHS best practice, confirming the ISO 27001 certification that has been awarded to ERS Connect and Chronos.

Improved Patient Experience

Taking advantage of the unique Chronos Web Application Trust staff are able to review individual appointment reminders, by listening to a recording of the call. This allows staff to promptly address any questions that may be directed to the Trust about the service that patients have received.

Further, Chronos allows the Trust to rapidly re-book appointments which have been cancelled by patients, increasing income from PbR. For patients, this reduces the time they have to spend waiting for an appointment.

The improved patient service, combined with the Trust's ability to mix different call types while controlling the number and timing of these calls, has resulted in an extremely positive patient reaction to the Chronos service, with only a few choosing to completely opt out.

“I am really impressed with ERS Connect's approach. They had implemented the system within a few weeks and had all key staff fully trained.”

Paul Williams
Head of Patient Access

Continued Success

Based on the successful results generated by the pilot, the Trust has since rolled out Chronos to cover some 12,000 appointments per month and the positive results already obtained look set to continue.

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