

# Exploring the factors involved in outpatients non-attendance: A Quality Improvement Project

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## Introduction

Physiotherapy have the highest did not attend (DNA) rate when compared to other clinical specialities (NHS Digital, 2019). For every 10.4 attendances one person does not attend (9.6%). High DNA rates increase costs and waiting times.

This improvement project was supported by the Clinical Improvement Scholarship Programme at Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals NHS Trust. The project aimed to identify the factors involved in non-attendance in a musculoskeletal (MSK) physiotherapy outpatients department.

The department has some pre-existing initiatives aimed at reducing DNAs: a text reminder with a financial impact message and posters with a 'cancel it, don't waste it' message.

## Methods

The project used the Kaizen A3 improvement approach. To understand the DNA problem further, data was gathered from three sources.

### Service data collection



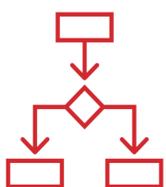
- The monthly DNA rate was calculated retrospectively.
- The average number of incoming calls to reception and the percentage of unanswered calls was calculated between January 6th and February 28th 2020.

### Service-user survey



- 32 service-users who DNA their appointments were surveyed by telephone.
- They were asked for the reason for their DNA and their experiences of cancelling their appointments.

### Process mapping

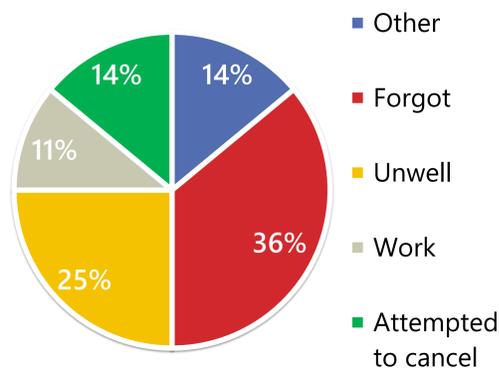


- Staff took part in a process mapping activity.
- Current approaches adopted by the department were discussed as well as describing a service-user's journey from the initial appointment to follow-up.

## Results

Over the financial year (2018-19), the DNA rate was 12.22% and equated to £67,875 of lost income over the year. Below are the results of the survey.

Reasons for DNA

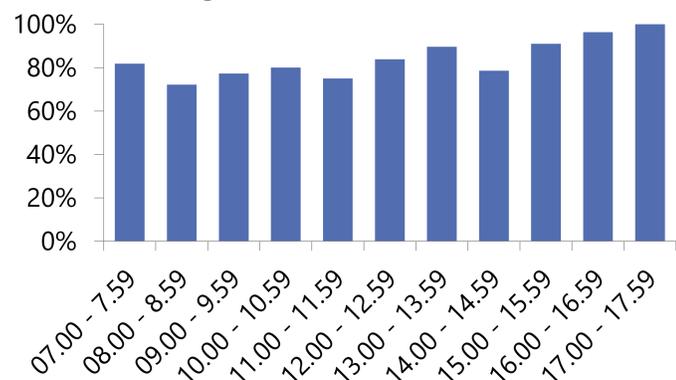


**17 out of 32 people surveyed experienced difficulties cancelling their appointments.**

Through the process mapping activity, staff identified two potential contributing factors: physiotherapists do not routinely offer an open appointment (a six month window where a service-user can return without a new referral) and the decision to book the appointment is often made by the physiotherapist.

Admin staff received five or more calls every hour between 8.00 a.m. and 3.59 p.m. The busiest time was between 9.00 a.m. and 9.59 a.m. where there was an average of nine calls. There was a high number of unanswered calls. Approximately eight in every ten calls were not answered.

Average % unanswered calls



## Conclusions

The project found that the department had a higher DNA rate than the national average. Staff and service-users identified problems with cancelling appointments. Service-users' access to the department was impaired by unanswered calls at reception. This is significant because it may impact DNA rates, service-user satisfaction, and people's ability to access the care that they need.

Implementation of this project's findings were delayed due to COVID-19. The department plans to introduce a window of time where calls are prioritised, training for administrative staff, and a cancellations email.

## Acknowledgements

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## References

NHS Digital. (2019, October 10). Hospital Outpatient Activity (2018-19). Retrieved from <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/hospital-outpatient-activity/2018-19#resources>