

Reducing No-Shows with Reminder Calls

Cozad, Madeline, MD; Sidani, Reem MD; Wan, Victor MD; Martinez, Ivan MD;
Ordoyne, Elliot MD; Tran, Lauren MD; Hochman-Zimmerman, Aaron MD

Background

"No-show" or empty time slots are a detriment to patients, physicians and clinic staff. Patients do not receive the benefits of medical care. Time is wasted by medical staff during preparation for these visits and unnecessary work is done by schedulers and administrative staff to arrange for these visits. These time slots are also denied to others who might have taken full advantage. Some no-show rate is to be expected, but it is to the benefit of all involved to reduce that rate to the lowest possible.

Current estimated average clinic attendance rate is: 70%

Aim

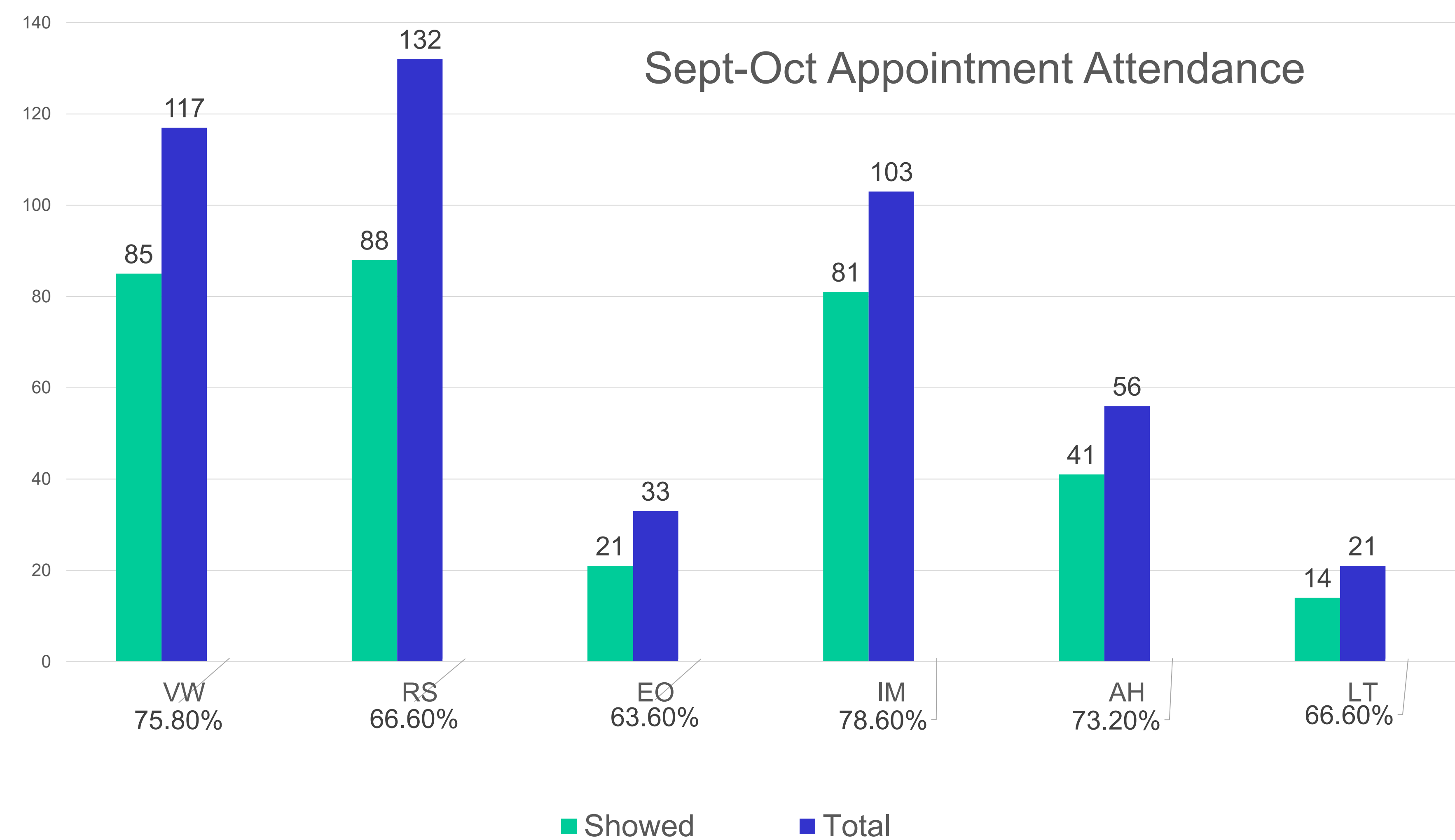
Reduce the number of empty appointment slots per clinic day. Measure no-show rate, then undertake one low-cost intervention to attempt to improve the attendance rate. Next steps for further investigations and interventions will follow data collection and analysis.

Methods

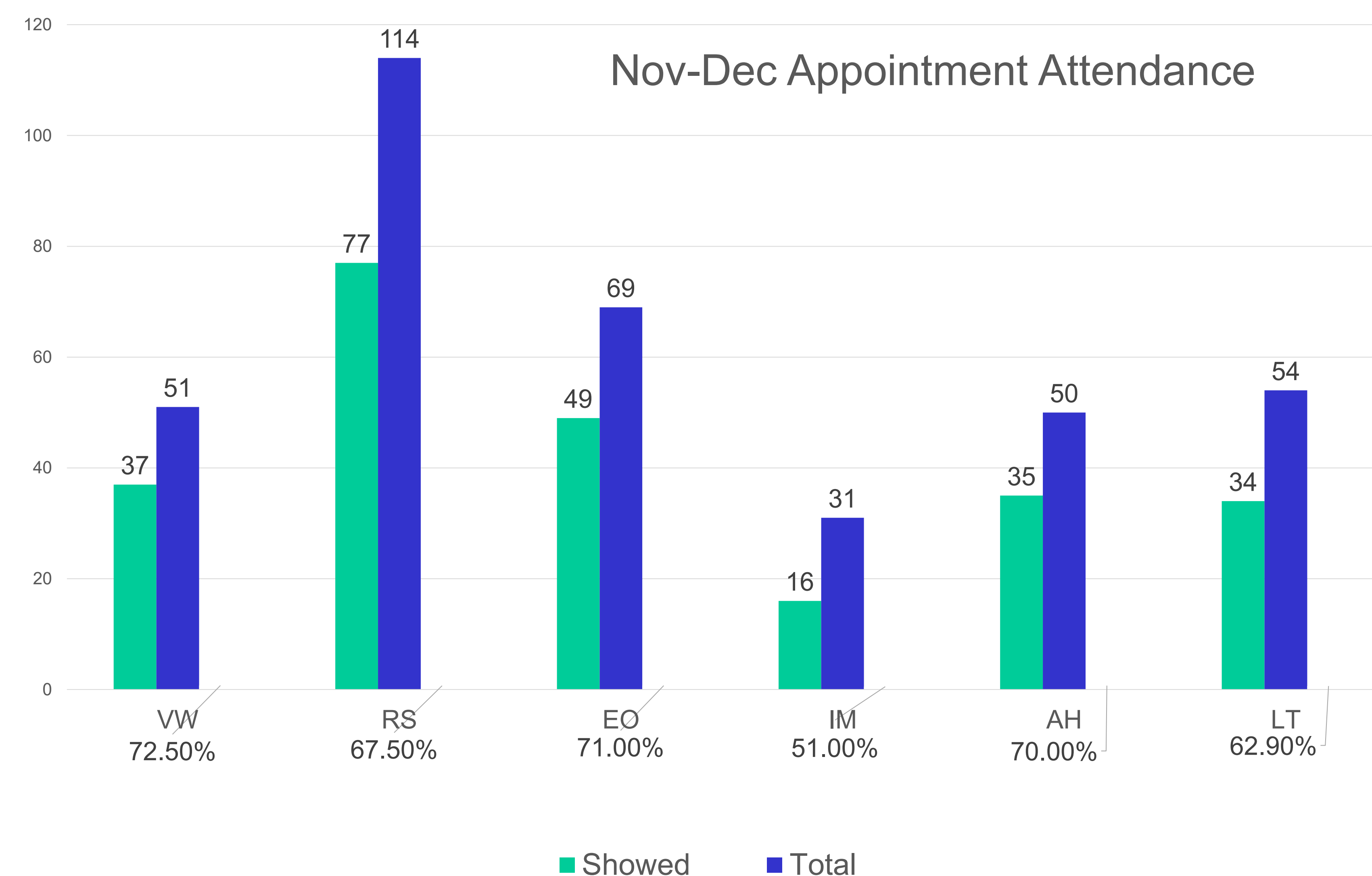
Residents measured their clinic no-show rates for eight weeks to establish a baseline. These rates were compared to the no-show rates for the next eight weeks when calls were placed, by the resident, to each patient on his or her schedule the next day. To remove bias, rather than engage in an individualized conversation, only voicemail messages (or text when necessary) were left. There were two standardized messages written, one in English and one in Spanish.

Results

Figure 1: Attendance Rates before and after reminder calls



Average attendance rate: 71.4%



Average attendance rate: 67.2%

Conclusion

Calls were ineffective

Results from this relatively small trial (369 experimental encounters) did not support the use of pre-appointment reminder calls. Yet, due to the loss of time and resources caused by missed appointments and the relatively low cost of an electronic reminder call/text system, the use of reminder calls may still provide a financial benefit over the long term. The project results seem to indicate that reminder calls are detrimental to patient attendance. However, it cannot be established that the message itself was the reason for the missed appointment. Given time constraints, rates could not be calculated year-on-year.

Future Directions

Other ideas to save lost appointments

Patients may be engaged through surveys, direct discussion to more personally determine the root causes and obstacles to timely attendance at scheduled appointments. Perhaps reminders do not address the root causes of missed appointments which may or may not include transportation issues, inflexible schedules or other factors. With a better understanding after a root cause analysis is complete, next steps can be set into motion.

References

Mohamed K, Mustafa A, Tahtamouni S, et al
A Quality Improvement Project to Reduce the 'No Show' rate in a Paediatric Neurology Clinic
BMJ Open
Quality 2016;5:u209266.w3789. doi: 10.1136/bmjquality.u209266.w3789