



More than meets the eye

Scheduling software has grown in recent years and can do a lot for your practice, if you use it to the fullest.

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HA VE YOU BEEN LOOKING FOR A WAY to reduce patient no-shows? Or bring down your claim-denial rate? Maybe you want to improve your relationships with referring providers. You might be surprised to learn that one of the easiest ways to do all of these things is to improve your patient-scheduling process.

Electronic scheduling allows you to do many things that other practices either don't do, or can't do consistently because they use paper calendars for appointment reminders, no-show tracking, and follow up. In addition, when fully employed, electronic scheduling can help increase the number of patients you see in a day and improve your claims process.

Even if you have an electronic scheduler now, you may not be making the most of it, or it may not offer all of the features you need. The right software

is a tool for improving your business.

If you've been putting off automation because you are concerned about the cost or the difficulty of implementation, think again. There are so many affordable options today that are easy to install and use.

Once you have selected the system that's right for you, it's up to you to make the most of it. Setting up your appointment scheduling and using it to the fullest will be one of the first and most important things you do. It sets the stage for improvements across the spectrum of the claims process, from getting accurate patient demographics to following up on patient-due balances.

Maximizing your time

With the right solution, you can maximize your schedule and increase the number of patients you can see each day. Do an analysis of the types of appointments you have.

Once you have identified those visits, look at how much time each visit takes and what resources need to be scheduled. You can then customize your scheduler with your practice resources (e.g., providers, rooms, and equipment) and place appointments at times of the day where they make the most sense.

For example: Put your longer, new-patient visits at the end of the day, while placing shorter visits earlier. Because you can schedule by resource, you can also book more than one patient for the same or overlapping time slots. Having more control over your scheduling helps you get more patients each day and helps you improve their experience by reducing wait times.

Developing the perfect schedule for your practice may take some work and even some trial and error, but in the end you'll find it's worth it.

Tracking your trouble spots

How do you know if your denials are falling after you improve your scheduling? Get your total number of claims submitted for the last year and your total number of denials. Then, divide the total number of denied claims by the total number of claims submitted. Use this percentage as your baseline so you can track how your denials decrease after you implement your practice management software.

Reminders reduce no-shows

Once you've customized your schedule and you start scheduling appointments, it's time to use the other tools in your system. Make sure whatever solution you choose comes with automated appointment reminders. Preferably, you want something that lets you send reminders by phone and email.

With automated reminders, you can eliminate the time-consuming task of calling patients. And if you aren't doing reminders now, you'll be shocked at how much they can reduce your no-shows.

The Medical Group Management Association (MGMA) estimates the average no-show rate at about 7 percent. For the typical chiropractor, that is between one and a half to two patients a day. Studies suggest that with reminders, you can reduce no-shows by 50 percent or better.

In addition, you can easily track and follow up with patients who do miss a visit, making it easy to call and reschedule or charge patients for their missed appointments. This can be particularly valuable for patients who are scheduling appointments several weeks or months ahead.

You can also use information gathered from tracking missed appointments to make changes to how you schedule recurring or follow-up appointments. *For example:* If you find that a lot of patients miss their "two-week follow-up" when it's more than two weeks away, try to keep the appointments at two weeks or less. Combined with a reminder, this may significantly resolve the problem.

Clean up your claims

According to the MGMA, the average denial rate in a medical practice is 7 to 9 percent. However, other studies have suggested that with some carriers the denial rate can be as high as 20 percent. How can your scheduling software help you reduce denials? Well, it's all about accuracy.

Scheduling a patient for an appointment is the first place where you can make a mistake that results in a denial. It is also the first opportunity that you have to reduce your denials. Do everything you can to ensure that the information you enter is correct, accurate, and complete.

Always confirm contact information when you make an appointment. And you need correct contact information for your reminders as well as your claims. When patients check in, don't just ask if everything is the same. Read through the contact and insurance information or, better yet, print it out and ask the patient to review it.

You'd be surprised how often the numbers in an address get inverted, a person's street is spelled wrong, or a piece of insurance information is incorrect. You won't regret spending the extra effort when you see your denials start to fall.

Ramp up your referrals

Another great thing about electronic scheduling is that you can track your referrals. Be sure that your staff asks for referral information and enters it in the system.

Find out where your referrals are coming from and take action on that

information. Who is sending patients, how many patients do they send, and do those patients show up?

With this data, you can create marketing campaigns with referring providers.

You can build an annual thank-you list for referring providers. Reach out in person to providers who could be sending more patients.

If your volumes are down, let referring providers know that you can get patients in quickly. Getting referrals is all about building relationships and instilling confidence in those providers. Electronic scheduling and reporting tools can help you do that.

This may sound too good to be true, but it isn't. It does require a commitment on your part. Improved scheduling is just the beginning. Automating practice management from scheduling to billing to reporting can provide many benefits to your practice.

You have to make the commitment to picking the solution that is right for your practice and using it to its fullest capacity. When you do that, you will definitely experience the benefits of improved workflow and increased revenue. 



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