

Patients miss one in 20 GP appointments at a cost of £200m, warns NHS England

One in 20 GP surgery appointments are being wasted because patients do not turn up and fail to warn surgeries they are not coming, costing the NHS over £200m annually.

The latest NHS Digital GP appointments data suggests that 15.4m GP appointments are going to waste every year because patients who don't turn up are not giving staff sufficient notice to make the appointments available to other patients.

Of the wasted appointments, just under half – 7.2m - were scheduled with GPs themselves. This adds up to more than 1.2m GP hours wasted each year – the equivalent of over 600 GPs working full time for a year.

NHS England urged people who could not attend to cancel appointments. With each slot costing the NHS an average of £30, the cost of the missed GP appointments comes to about £216m a year.

NHS England said this could pay for either:

- the annual salary of 2,325 full time GPs;
- 224,640 cataract operations;
- 58,320 hip replacement operations;
- 216,000 drug treatment courses for Alzheimer's; or
- the annual salary of 8,424 full time community nurses.

NHS England acting director of primary care Dr Nikki Kanani said: 'Our message is clear - if you cannot make it to your appointment or no longer need a consultation, please let your GP practice know in advance so the appointment can be filled by another patient.'

RCGP chair Professor Helen Stokes-Lampard said the situation was a 'frustrating waste of resources' not just for GPs and their teams but for patients struggling to get an appointment.

She said: 'There may be many reasons why a patient might miss an appointment, and in some cases it can be an indication that something serious is going on for that individual - but we would urge patients to let us know if they can't attend as soon as possible, so that we can offer that time to someone else who really needs it.'

'To this end, practices are using electronic methods, such as SMS reminders, to encourage patients to keep their appointments, or cancel them in a timely manner.'

BMA GP committee chair Dr Richard Vautrey said: 'It is really important for patients to do all they can to make the most of appointments provided to them and to inform their local practice if they cannot attend a previously booked consultation.'

'Practices will try many ways to address this problem, but ultimately patients do need to play their part. With the NHS finances under historic strain, it's vital that don't waste the resources we currently have.'

Tom de Castella