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Did Not Attend (DNA) Policy

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1 Introduction

1.1 Policy statement

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance regarding the management of patients who failed to attend their appointments. It is essential to make the best use of the clinicians' availability to ensure that all patients have access to appointments within an acceptable time frame.

1.2 Status

This document and any procedures contained within it are non-contractual and may be modified or withdrawn at any time. For the avoidance of doubt, it does not form part of your contract of employment.

1.3 KLOE

The Care Quality Commission would expect any primary care organisation to have a policy to identify patients who fail to attend their appointments and in particular whether this has a safeguarding concerns, such as if it involves a child or vulnerable adult.

This policy and its procedures should be used as evidence of compliance against CQC Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE).¹ Specifically, Dunelm Medical Practice will need to answer the CQC Key Questions on "Safe" and "Responsive"

The following is the CQC definition of Safe:

By safe, we mean people are protected from abuse and avoidable harm. *Abuse can be physical, sexual, mental or psychological, financial, neglect, institutional or discriminatory abuse.*

CQC KLOE S1

How do systems, processes and practices keep people safe and safeguarded from abuse?



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S1.1	How are safety and safeguarding systems, processes and practices developed, implemented and communicated to staff?
S1.2	How do systems, processes and practices protect people from abuse, neglect, harassment and breaches of their dignity and respect? How are these monitored and improved?
S1.6	Are there arrangements to safeguard adults and children from abuse and neglect that reflect relevant legislation and local requirements? Do staff understand their responsibilities and adhere to safeguarding policies and procedures, including working in partnership with other agencies?
S1.7	Do staff identify adults and children at risk of, or suffering, significant harm? How do they work in partnership with other agencies to ensure they are helped, supported and protected?

The following is the CQC definition of Responsive:

By responsive, we mean that services meet people's needs.

CQC KLOE R3	Can people access care and treatment in a timely way?
R3.1	Do people have timely access to initial assessment, test results, diagnosis or treatment?
R3.2	Can people access care and treatment at a time to suit them?
R3.3	What action is taken to minimise the length of time people have to wait for care, treatment or advice?
R3.5	Are appointment systems easy to use and do they support people to access appointments?
R3.7	Do services run on time and are people kept informed about any disruption?
R3.8	How is technology used to support timely access to care and treatment? Is the technology (including telephone systems and online/digital services) easy to use?



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1.4 Training and support

This organisation will provide guidance and support to help those to whom it applies to understand their rights and responsibilities under this policy. Additional support will be provided to managers and supervisors to enable them to deal more effectively with matters arising from this policy.

2 Scope

2.1 Who it applies to

This document applies to all employees of the organisation and other individuals performing functions in relation to the organisation, such as Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme (ARRS) employees¹, agency workers, locums and contractors.

2.2 Why and how it applies to them

This document sets out the procedures for monitoring and recording and the required actions to be taken to effectively manage missed appointments at Dunelm Medical Practice. Within general practice, failure to attend appointments is commonplace. It is therefore essential that an efficient management system is in place.

The organisation aims to design and implement policies and procedures that meet the diverse needs of our service and workforce, ensuring that none are placed at a disadvantage over others, in accordance with the [Equality Act 2010](#). Consideration has been given to the impact this policy might have with regard to the individual protected characteristics of those to whom it applies.

3 Definition of terms

3.1 Did Not Attend

Failure to attend an appointment is commonly referred to as "Did Not Attend" or DNA. For the purpose of this policy, the acronym DNA will be used.

¹ [Network DES Contract specification 2020/21](#)



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4 Policy

4.1 Statistical evidence

As well as being costly in financial terms, patients who fail to attend their agreed medical appointments often create excessive waiting times for other patients.

In 2016, Dr Robert Varham, the then Head of General Practice Development at NHS England, published his *"Releasing Time for Care: 10 High Impact Actions for General Practice"*² of which "Reducing DNA" featured as being one of the areas that was needed to improve productivity.

More recently, a BBC news article dated 2 January 2019³ stated that patients who miss GP appointments were currently costing NHS England £216 million a year with data showing that more than 15 million consultations were being wasted because patients failed to show up.

At Dunelm Medical Practice, during any month, an average of 35 hours of wasted appointments due to patients who DNA. Patients are recorded as being a DNA, meaning that the patient neither attended their appointment nor advised the practice within 24 hours prior to the scheduled appointment, to enable a cancellation or change to their appointment to be made.

The effects:

- An increase in waiting times for patients resulting in the risk of worsening patients' health
- A waste of the organisation's time – not simply the clinicians' time but also that of the administration team as the appointment invariably needs to be rebooked
- Cost to the wider NHS in the requirement of additional clinicians
- Potential of risk to a child who is reliant upon an adult to ensure that they attend their appointment

4.2 Recording DNAs

² [NHS England: Releasing Time for Care - 10 High Impact Actions for General Practice](#)

³ www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-46732626



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All DNAs are to be recorded on SystmOne in each patient's healthcare record with the following SNOMED CT⁴ codes:

- Did not attend – Reason given – 185326000
- Did not attend – No reason given – 270426007

The Operations Manager will review DNA statistics on a monthly basis, presenting this information at a partners meeting. DNAs are to be displayed, highlighting the facts in the waiting room and on the organisation's website and facebook page.

Statistically, signs that communicate the number of patients who did not attend in previous months, with signs that conveyed the much larger number of patients who did turn up, resulted in a 31.7% reduction in DNAs compared to the previous 12 months' average.⁵

4.3 DNA logging

DNA's are recorded in the clinical system, the organisation reviews these on a monthly basis.

Logging these failures to attend achieves the following:

- Monitors DNA and looks at trends
- Acts as a methodology should a patient complain that there is a lack of available appointments
- Promotes CQC compliance

4.4 Preventative measures

Almost every primary care organisation has done at least something to try to reduce DNAs. However, the evidence shows that it is usually necessary to do several things and that some of the common approaches need to be adjusted in order to be successful.

In order to reduce the number of DNAs, the organisation will offer:

- Easy cancellation

⁴ <https://termbrowser.nhs.uk>

⁵ www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3308641



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Rapid access is provided for patients who wish to contact the organisation to cancel an appointment. Dunelm Medical Practice's approach is to have online access to all patients who request, and phone lines are open 8.30am – 6pm.

- Appointment reminders

Patients are sent a text message to remind them about a forthcoming appointment. The reminder includes an explanation of how to cancel the appointment if it is no longer wanted.

- Report attendances

The Deputy Manager will publish DNA information monthly and make it readily available in the waiting room and on the organisation's website and facebook page.

- Patient engagement

Dunelm Medical Practice will discuss the issue with the Patient Participation Group (PPG) to highlight the numbers and plans for improving the DNA rates.

The organisation's information leaflet will set out Dunelm Medical Practices's policy on dealing with patients who fail to attend their appointments.

4.5 Managing DNAs (face to face appointment)

Should a patient fail to attend their appointment the clinician will enter the fact that the appointment was missed and will record it as:

Did not attend – No reason given – SNOMED CT 270426007

If a patient cancels their appointment after the appointment time has passed, whether that be over the phone, in person or online this will be recorded as a DNA as no other patient can then be offered the appointment,

Did not attend – Reason given – SNOMED CT 185326000

It should be noted that, whilst unacceptable in most cases, there may be extenuating circumstances as to why the patient failed to attend their appointment. Therefore, prior to any letter being sent to a patient, it would be reasonable to discuss this with their clinician.

If the patient fails to attend 2 appointment within a 12 month period, and should there be no reasonable mitigating circumstances, a letter will be sent to the patient.



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Should the patient then fail to attend a third appointment within the same 12 month period, a decision will be made by Operations Manager and Dr S Wild as to whether the patient is to be removed from the practice list.

Prior to writing to the patient using the template at [Annex C](#), the senior GP will assess whether removing the patient from the practice list would be detrimental to the patient's health or wellbeing and cause significant harm. Should the decision be made to remove the patient from Dunelm Medical Practice the BMA has provided the following guidance that must be followed:

www.bma.org.uk/advice/employment/gp-practices/service-provision/removal-of-patients-from-gp-lists

Letters sent to patients are only valid for a 12-month period. These letters are to be saved in each patient's electronic health record.

By reducing the number of DNAs, the organisation will:

- Enhance the efficiency of clinical sessions
- Reduce costs
- Increase productivity
- Offer a more effective service to patients
- Enable more effective booking of slots

4.6 Managing failed telephone encounters

Telephone consultation failed encounters must also be managed appropriately to ensure patient safety is not compromised.

If a patient fails to answer a pre-booked telephone consultation, after the second attempt at calling, it is the responsibility of the clinician initiating the call to code this as a "Failed encounter – no answer when rang back" using the SNOMED CT code 185337004.

The patient must then be sent a message using AccuRx asking them to contact Dunelm Medical Practice. This must also be recorded in the patient's healthcare record.

When the patient contacts Dunelm Medical Practice to rearrange, the receptionist or administrator is to ask why the patient failed to answer the pre-booked call. There are many feasible reasons for doing so, see examples below (this list is not exhaustive):

- Lost signal
- Was on another call
- Phone went straight to voice mail



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- Caller ID was blocked

By doing so, Dunelm Medical Practice can determine the root cause of such failed encounters and take appropriate action, i.e., advise all patients that the call will be coming from a withheld number thereby preventing future failed encounters.

If a patient has requested a call back from a clinician and they fail to answer, the same principle applies although the clinician should, at the next available opportunity within that same session, make a second attempt to call the patient. Should the patient fail to answer the call for the third time, the clinician is to read code this as a "Failed Encounter – no answer when rang back" using the SNOMED CT code 185337004.

4.7 Children who fail to attend

Awareness is to be given to children who fail to attend an appointment.

Whilst all missed appointments have traditionally been classified as a "Did Not Attend", this group actually needs to be classified as "Was Not Brought" as it is not a child's responsibility to attend the appointment; it is the responsibility of their parents or carers to take them. As such, awareness must be given to this and the consideration that this could be termed as medical neglect.⁶

For further information, [The Nottingham Safeguarding Children Board](#) has developed a video to assist with understanding the differences between medical neglect and a simple DNA.

4.8 Actions needed for a "Was Not Brought"

Although it is a subtle difference, coding non-attendance of children as "Child not brought to appointment" using the SNOMED CT code 901441000000108 may be considered to enable more accurate safeguarding auditing in addition to emphasising the potential failure by those responsible for the child's welfare.

Any non-attendance by a child to their medical appointment will trigger a letter that needs to be sent to the parent or carer to ascertain the reasons behind the non-attendance. Any response from the parent or guardian will also be noted in the patient's clinical record.

All missed appointments should be flagged within the safeguarding task group which is reviewed regularly by the clinical group.

⁶ [British Journal of General Practitioners](#)



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Further information can be found in the [Safeguarding Policy](#). A letter for a child who "Was not brought" can be found at [Annex D](#).

For a child who misses a vaccination, refer to the [Childhood Vaccination and Immunisations Policy](#)

4.9 Organisation information

In order to remind patients of the significance of DNAs, templates for posters to display in the waiting room can be found at [Annex E](#).

4.10 Summary

Patients who fail to attend their medical appointments continue to have a significant financial impact across the NHS. Having a robust management system in place will help to reduce the number of DNAs at Dunelm Medical Practice and ensure that all patients have improved access to an appointment within an acceptable time frame.



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Annex A – First letter to patient

Dear [insert patient name],

Our records show that you had an appointment booked with [insert clinician's name] on [insert day and date] but failed to attend this appointment. If you believe this to be incorrect, please contact us on [insert phone number] to discuss.

Appointments at [insert organisation name] are at a premium and this missed appointment could have been used by another patient if you had provided the practice with adequate notice that the appointment was no longer required.

During this last month, [insert number] appointments were recorded as “Did Not Attend” (DNA) which represents [add percentage] of appointments at [insert organisation name]. Please be advised that this organisation has a DNA policy which, for patients who repeatedly fail to attend, may result in them being removed from the organisation's list.

If you need to cancel or change an appointment, you can:

- Call the dedicated appointment line on [insert number]
- Email [insert email address]
- Text [insert text number]
- Cancel your appointment via our website [insert website]
- [Enter any other method]

Please help us to maximise appointment availability in the future. Your cooperation is very much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

[Practice manager]



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Annex B – Second letter to patient

Dear [insert patient name],

Our records show that you had an appointment booked with [insert clinician's name] on [insert day and date] but failed to attend this appointment. If you believe this to be incorrect, please contact us on [insert phone number] to discuss.

We previously wrote to you on [insert day and date] regarding an appointment you had missed on [insert day and date]. This is the second occasion you have failed to attend a scheduled appointment within a 12 month period.

In our previous letter, we advised you that you can cancel or change an appointment by:

- Calling the dedicated appointment line on [insert number]
- Emailing [insert email address]
- Texting [insert text number]
- Cancel your appointment via our website [insert website]
- [Enter any other method]

If you fail to attend a third appointment within the same 12 month period, we will consider removing you from the organisation's list.

Please help us to maximise appointment availability in the future by contacting us as soon as you know you will be unable to attend your scheduled appointment. Your cooperation is very much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

[Practice manager]



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Annex C – Removal of a patient

Dear [insert patient name],

Our records show that you had an appointment booked with [insert clinician's name] on [insert day and date] but failed to attend this appointment. If you believe this to be incorrect, please contact us on [insert phone number] to discuss.

We previously wrote to you on [insert day and date] regarding the appointments you missed on [insert day and date] and [insert day and date]. You have now missed three appointments within a 12 month period without justification.

Having discussed this with the practice manager, we have decided that we are removing you from our organisation's list. We notified NHS England on [insert date] of our decision and you will be removed on the eighth day following notification.

You are advised to register with another practice in the local area as soon as possible. A list of primary care organisations can be found at www.nhs.uk by entering your postcode in the "Find local services" section.

The decision to remove you from the list was not taken lightly but it is imperative that we provide an efficient service for all of our listed patients and we are unable to do so if a patient repeatedly fails to attend scheduled appointments.

The practice team wishes you well for the future.

Yours sincerely,

[Senior GP]



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Annex D – Letter regarding child who was not brought

[Reference - Insert patient name],

Dear [insert name]

Our records show that your child had an appointment booked with [insert clinician's name] on [insert day and date] but failed to attend this appointment. If you believe this to be incorrect, please contact us on [insert phone number] to discuss.

Appointments at [insert organisation name] are at a premium and this missed appointment could have been used by another patient if you had provided the practice with adequate notice that the appointment was no longer required.

[If the appointment was a missed vaccination insert the following:

Vaccination is the most important thing we can do to protect ourselves and our children against ill health. They prevent up to three million deaths worldwide every year.

Since vaccines were introduced in the UK, diseases like smallpox, polio and tetanus that used to kill or disable millions of people have either been eradicated or are seen very rarely. Other diseases like measles and diphtheria have been reduced by up to 99.9% since vaccines against them were introduced.

To understand the benefits of immunisations, please find [enclosed/link to] the World Health Organization leaflet titled: [If you choose not to vaccinate your child, understand the risks and responsibilities](#)

Clinical appointments that have been booked for a child who lacks capacity need to be brought to the appointment by the parent or person with parental responsibility. Failure in bringing a child to a medical appointment will always be classified as a "Was not brought" with a note being placed within the patient's medical record.

Please be advised that, should there be continued failures to bring a child to their medical appointment, we would consider this as potential neglect towards that child and, as a result, this practice is obliged to advise the local safeguarding team of any concern that we may have.

If you need to cancel or change any appointment, you can:

- Call the dedicated appointment line on [insert number]
- Email [insert email address]



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- Text back to your reminder message
- Cancel your appointment via My Health Online
- Cancel your appointment via our website [insert website]

Please help us to maximise appointment availability in the future. Your cooperation is very much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

[Insert name and role]

Annex E – Waiting room poster

Click here to download the [DNA percentage poster](#) or [3 Reasons not to miss your appointment](#)



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3 reasons **NOT** to miss your appointment

1

Help other patients

If you book an appointment but do not attend, another patient will miss out.

Reduce our workload

Failure to attend or to cancel an appointment increases administrative work.

2

3

Save the NHS money

According to Government data, a GP appointment costs up to £50. Missed appointments waste money that you have invested in the NHS.

How can you help?

Here are 3 simple ways you can help us to reduce the number of wasted appointments:

1. Encourage family members and friends to attend or cancel their appointment.
2. Write down your appointment and/or add to your phone calendar. Even better, set a reminder.
3. Always cancel unwanted appointments, no matter how late in the day.

Thank you for your co-operation, support and help.