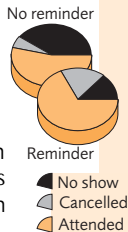


By introducing a **phone reminder** an alcohol clinic in Liverpool cut by nearly two-thirds the number of patients who simply failed to turn up for assessment, avoiding wasted time due to missed appointments.

The clinic sends referrals a letter asking them to reply choosing one of the programmes on offer. Respondents are sent an assessment appointment. Before the study, the clinic had found that patients who came to their appointments were more likely to live nearby and had on average been responded to slightly faster by the clinic, but overall only about a half of patients sent appointments turned up.

To improve on this the clinic tried phoning 50 patients one to three days before their appointment to remind them and ask if they would be coming. ① Another 50 matched patients received no reminders. The effect was that more patients came (34 as against 27) and more notified the clinic in advance that they would not be coming (9 v. 3). Together this meant that just 7 of the reminded patients simply failed to turn up compared to 20 under normal procedures, a highly significant difference. The effect on attendance might have been limited because the set script of the reminder gave no opportunity to motivate attendance, found in other studies (▶ *Links*) to make a substantial difference to treatment uptake.



LINKS *The power of the welcoming reminder*, issue 11

① Booth P.G. *et al.* "Factors associated with attendance for first appointments at an alcohol clinic and the effects of telephone prompting." *Journal of Substance Use*: 2004, 9(6), p. 269–279. **AC**