

# Implementing a Late Notice Policy

A good Late Notice Policy is essential for driving the culture of your business.

## Recognise the need for a late notice policy

It's perceived indifference that kills business. If your clients perceive that you don't really mind if they do or do not show up for an appointment, then that is the culture that will be carried through the the rest of your business.

A good late notice policy is important for many reasons

- Emphasising the importance of the service you're providing
- Setting the rules with your clients is important, otherwise they will set them for you
- Missed appointments kill business - especially if there is a culture of perceived indifference
- The income from missed appointments can add up... if there are 2 missed appointments per day per practitioner and you charge \$80 per appointment this adds up to \$60,000 per practitioner in lost income per year.
- A good late notice policy gives a sense of comfort for the client that you place importance on them being there.

Both you and your staff need to know and understand the importance, otherwise it will never work.

## Write the policy

In the example late notice policy document, you'll notice the language and how we haven't used the word "cancel" or "cancellation". Using those words reinforces to clients that there may be a possibility of cancelling their appointment, which is something we don't actually want them to do.

Also, notice the reciprocating rule. We don't expect our clients to do anything we wouldn't do ourselves, so we hold ourselves to the same standard and offer a bonus appointment for them if we have to change their appointment at late notice.

We charge the full appointment fee for a missed appointment but offer a fee reduction of 50% if paid within 7 days.

## Communicate the policy

You may go through a few tough times when implementing the policy for the first time. We did, even though we had a sign in the reception, mentioned it on the new patient paperwork and even printed it on the back of every receipt.

Most problems arise because clients don't think you will actually enforce the policy. The best way to counter this is to simply talk about the fee. If a client phones to cancel or change an appointment at late notice, simply say the following:

**“I want to help you avoid the late notice fee. Are you able to come in a bit later today at all? (or, Are you sure you can't make it?)”**

This one mention of the late notice fee on the phone often results in the appointment being kept, or perhaps shifted to a different time on the same day. When clients realise they will be charged regardless, it's much easier for them to prioritise the appointment.

For those that simply can't make it, they expect the fee in the mail, so it doesn't come as a surprise and upset them.

Take the opportunity at the Initial consultation to talk about the fee with your client. A good way to do that is during a “New Client Welcome”, where the receptionist sits with them to discuss this and other housekeeping items.

## Enforce the Policy

There is nothing more important than actually enforcing the fee. You may like to make it easier for yourself or your team by giving grace for the first occasion, or halving the fee if it is paid within 7 days.

Whatever the case, it's essential that a letter, email or SMS is sent on EVERY occasion an appointment is missed or changed at late notice - even if the letter is only to acknowledge the missed appointment with the fee waived.

This reinforces the importance you place on the policy, and also raises the importance in the minds of your clients.

Don't worry if people get upset. You can always waive the fee. The main thing is that you are communicating the importance you place on clients being there.

## Measure the effectiveness

A handy KPI to monitor is “Missed Appointment Percentage” for each practitioner. Aim to be below 2%.

You can monitor this before you implement the policy and again afterwards to see how it has worked.

Also, don't be afraid to receive feedback from your clients about the policy. Any complaining or frustration from clients is an opportunity for you to refine the system in a way that works best for your clinic.

Remember, effective communication and monitoring of your late notice policy should mean you may never actually have to charge a fee. Value your service offering and use the Late Notice policy as an effective tool for setting the culture in your business.

# Example Late Notice Fee

We're proud to run on time so you can plan your day effectively.

- **If we ask you to change** your appointment within 12 hours to a different day, we may offer you a bonus appointment with no out of pocket fee.
- **If you need to reschedule** an appointment you must provide us with at least 12 hours' notice to avoid a fee.
- **If you miss an appointment** without notice the full fee will apply.

We understand that sometimes life gets in the way of scheduled appointment times, and we do take extenuating circumstances into consideration.

Missed appointment: \$90

Late notice change of appointment: \$90

*Health fund benefits do not apply to these fees*

## Extra angles/ideas:

- Help us NEVER charge a missed appointment fee.
- We'd rather talk about fees than late fees.
- We're sticklers for punctuality, so you can plan your day.
- Avoiding late fees is easy. All you need to do is give us 12 hours notice.
- We'd love 12 hours notice so we can keep our clinic, practitioners and people happy.
- Help us stay organised and on-time by offering 12 hours notice if you can't make your appointment.
- You'll receive an SMS reminder the day before your appointment. Can't make it? Simply reply and let us know. That way, we stay on time and you avoid late fees.
- Last minute change of plans? Let us know by close of business the day before your appointment if you're unable to attend.
- Unexpected emergency? Call us when possible to let us know you're OK. We always take extenuating circumstances into consideration.
- Bonus! You'll get to chat to one of our lovely reception staff.

### **Alternative - 'Optimising Your Outcome'**

Change title of policy from things like 'late notice and non-attendance policy' to 'maintaining our appointment schedule' or 'optimising your outcome'.

In order to create a momentum of healing and progress, it is optimal for us to follow our ideal progress plan. If you need to change an appointment, please allow us 24 hours notice so that we can arrange to care for another client during that time. It will also allow you to avoid the fee for missed or late notice changes to your appointment.