



Do we vilify the DNAs?



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Life throws cheeky curve balls at all of us, writes

Nicola Sherlock, perhaps we should not be so quick to judge?

Do we unjustly label patients who fail to attend their appointments? Or for that matter, those who cancel at short notice?

I know I have. Looking though a patient's attendance history and deciding when I can fit them in for a follow-up, I may not have always been very fair. I suspect all dental professionals know what I mean.

So Mrs Bloggs phones at 9am to cancel little Jeanetta's appointment at 9.15am; she's had D&V all night (last week it was chicken pox/a

special assembly/the plague or something along those lines) and when you're looking for the next available appointment you skip past a few empty gaps thinking, 'Those appointments can be saved for the patients who bother to turn up when they're supposed to'. We've all done it. It's probably human nature, if you ask Freud.

But actually, now I'm a mum of three (twins, no less) with a full-time job, a house and garden to keep tidy, World Book Day outfits to magic out of thin air, PTA members to fend off and three healthy, balanced meals to plan and execute for a family of five...., I think I might be starting to empathise with some of those pesky DNAers.

Don't get me wrong, we all know the patients who really are poor attenders and who consistently try it on, and there is a genuine safeguarding concern with some patients who must be identified and managed. But life can throw cheeky curve balls at all of us. We fly by the seat of our pants trying to keep all of our balls in the air and enjoy it at the same time (ha!); throw into that mix a child with additional needs or an elderly relative who needs care, support and lots of other appointments with other service providers - and life can sometimes get the better of us mere mortals.

I'll confess - I've missed appointments even though I know the frustration I've felt when a patient doesn't show up and I have already taken the sterile wrap off a full endo kit. But let me tell you, having a school trip that you've only just been handed the letter for which is happening that very same day (great kids aren't they?) or an appointment at

2pm on a school/work day that turns out to be the busiest day of the century and you realise at 4pm when the affray quietsens that you've done the unspeakable and failed to attend one of your own children's appointments - it happens and it's very humbling.

What's more humbling is having to ring and grovel and give reasons which sound like whopping fibs when you say them out loud then listen and remember the things you would usually say to patients such as 'If you can let us know you aren't going to attend, we can give that appointment to someone else', 'There's a couple of 'Cancelled at short notice' (CSNs) on your record already you know?' or 'Do you know how much missed appointments cost the NHS?'. That last one is totally not to be glib about, I know.

More recently, I had those DNAs/CSNs thrown at me again by the paediatrician's very thorough secretary because lots of hospital and community services are now using the same patient record software. This is great for continuing care and also great for grassing you up to the next guy!

And that's with community or hospital service providers; a GDP would've blacklisted us forevermore, leaving us in the notoriously barren 'Trying-to-Find-a-Dentist' land. Yikes, I'm just a person trying to get my 'to do' list written, never mind executed, give me a break maybe?

So, are we too harsh in judging the one off DNA/CSNers? I think we might be. We have all been there!

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