

Improving outpatient clinic attendance during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Introduction

Outpatient clinics have been severely restricted during COVID-19; the specialties face a tremendous challenge in service provision going forward. Attendance has been low in many centres despite implementation of COVID-19-related safety precautions.¹ This study aimed to look at ways to improve clinic attendance during COVID-19.

Methods

Patients invited to the ophthalmology outpatient clinic at Luton and Dunstable Hospital between 22 June and 17 July 2020 were asked to give consent to complete a single telephone questionnaire. All patients that failed to attend their appointment were approached to take part. We also recruited a sample of 100 patients that attended clinic for comparison.

Results

546 patients were invited to clinic. Of these, 446 (71.7%) attended their appointment and 100 (18.3%) did not. 97 non-attenders were eligible for enrolment, of which 78 (80.4%) consented to the study. 32/78 (41%) did not attend for COVID-19-related reasons; of these 27/32 (84.4%) were not aware of the COVID-19-related safety precautions in clinic. 23/78 (29.5%) of non-attenders weren't aware of their appointment. 38% of attenders weren't aware of the safety precautions prior to their appointment. Following their visit, 95% of attenders felt that the safety precautions were excellent or satisfactory, and 99% would attend clinic again.

Conclusion

Our results show the need for enhanced communication to improve patients' awareness of COVID-19-related safety precautions and that clinics are still running. This is key to improving attendance and preventing NHS services becoming unsustainable during this pandemic. ■

Conflicts of interest

None declared.

Reference

- 1 Royal College of Ophthalmologists. *Guidance on restarting medial retina services*. RCOph, 2020. www.rcophth.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Guidance-on-restarting-Medial-Retina-Services.pdf [Accessed 08 September 2020].

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