

Missed Appointment Policy

The National Health Service (General Dental Services Contracts) Regulations 2005 stated that NHS dentists could no longer charge patients for failing to attend their appointments as there is no direct financial loss to dentist or dental practice. However, it is recognised that a missed appointment is a lost opportunity to provide surgery time to another patient.

The Missed Appointment Policy is in place at the practice to ensure a consistent, fair and transparent process is undertaken when a patient misses an appointment.

The practice considers any appointment to be 'missed' where the patient fails to attend or fails to provide at least 24 hours notice on cancellation of an appointment.

The policy is made clear and is available to patients in the practice by:

- Displaying a missed appointment poster in the waiting room
- Having a clear statement included in the practice leaflet
- Having a clear statement on all reminder emails
- Making new patients aware of the missed appointment policy when they join the practice
- Reminding patients of the practice policy prior to agreeing a treatment plan

The NHS Dental Regulations, Schedule 3 Part 1 (5), make provision for patients being excluded from treatment by a practice where there has been an irreparable breakdown in relations. The practice reserves the right to decide that this is deemed to have happened where a patient continually misses appointments. The practice is committed to investing time in understanding why a patient has missed appointments before deciding not to see a patient again. The final outcome is down to the discretion of the practice manager and presiding dentist depending on the patient's circumstances.

The practice will not discriminate in its decision to restrict access to NHS services for the vulnerable and socially disadvantaged members of society. Exceptions will be considered for patients whose mental impairment or physical state may affect their attendance. Withdrawal of NHS care in these cases will be at the practice's discretion only after all other reasonable resolutions have been exhausted, and after a discussion with the patient.

To help minimise missed appointments the practice will:

- Educate patients about the impact of missed appointments, instilling the message that it is always preferable to cancel an appointment with sufficient notice rather than missing the appointment.

- Inform patients about the consequences of missed appointments (such as wasted surgery time).
- Make patients aware of the number of missed appointments in each given month via poster in the waiting room, and how much surgery time this has wasted.
- Ensure that patients are aware of the importance to their health in attending regularly, especially for longer appointments.
- Make patients aware when they miss appointments via phone call, email, or letter, and making adequate notes on the patient's file where these communications have taken place.
- Provide a courtesy reminder service to patients to assist in attending their appointments, which will be done via email, text, or phone call.

Missed Appointment Process - NHS

Step 1 – First Missed Appointment (in a 24 month period)

- Patient is made aware of the missed appointment via phone call from a member of the reception team.
- The patient will be asked the reason behind the missed appointment. If the reason does not fall under the exceptional circumstances criteria (see below) then the patient is advised that further missed appointments may result in withdrawal of future NHS care at the practice.
- Notes are to be made on the patient's file about the actions taken by the reception member.
- The first missed appointment letter is also sent to the patient via email. If the patient does not have an email address then this will be sent via postal service.
- This step should be completed within 48 hours of the missed appointment.

Step 2 – Second Missed Appointment (in a 24 month period)

- The second missed appointment letter is sent to the patient via postal service. This will outline the date of the missed appointment as well as confirmation of Thurmaston Dental Practice's right to withdraw further NHS treatment as a result of missed appointments.
- Patients will be made aware that they have 28 days to contact the practice to appeal the decision to be removed from the practice list.
- If the patient does not lodge an appeal within 28 days then the patient is removed from the practice list and no further NHS care will be provided.
- The patient is also given the contact details of NHS Choices and advised to register at an alternate practice.

- A task is set by the receptionist for the practice manager for 28 days in the future. If the patient has failed to respond within 28 days then the practice manager permanently closes the patient's file and advises the area team (via tracker) of the decision.

Step 3 – Appeal (if applicable)

- If the patient lodges an appeal within 28 days then the practice manager will consult with the patient's dentist to determine whether the dentist feels that these missed appointments are sufficient to be considered an irreparable breakdown in relations.
- The practice manager and dentist may consider factors including (but not limited to):
 - Previous attendance history of the patient.
 - Whether the patient has exceptional circumstances that would result in missed appointments.
 - Whether withdrawing further NHS care would breach the Equality Act 2010 on the grounds of discrimination.
 - Whether withdrawing further NHS care would be against the best interest of the patient.
- Where there is no clear decision, the advice of the practice principal or a dental defence organisation may be sought.
- Once a decision has been made this will be given to the patient in the form of a letter, and this should be done within 21 days of the original appeal.
- Patients who are unhappy with the decision of the appeal can make a complaint through the practice complaints procedure if they wish to pursue this further.

Missed Appointment Process - Private

Private patients may incur a charge for missed appointments depending on the length and type of appointment. This charge will be at the discretion of the dentist and patient care manager.

Missed dental appointments = £2.00 x appointment length (in minutes)

Missed hygiene appointments = £2.00 x appointment length (in minutes)

Where the dentist and patient care manager agree that a patient's missed appointments has resulted in an irreparable breakdown in communication, the patient care manager will contact the patient via phone call, email or letter explaining this.

Patients who miss a number of private appointments may be offered (with the consent of the dentist) an appointment with an alternate dentist. However they may be asked to pay for their appointments in advance under the Patient Deposit Policy.

Exceptional Circumstances

The practice appreciates that not all appointments can be cancelled with sufficient notice based on the circumstance. In these instances the practice manager and presiding dentist will make the final decision on whether an appointment will be considered as 'missed'.

These reasons include (but are not limited to):

- Death or serious illness of a family member or significant friend.
- Serious illness of the patient where attending the practice would be against the best interest of the patient and/or other patients and staff.
- Vehicle breakdown on the way to the appointment.
- A practice mistake with booking.
- Where a patient has arrived for the appointment but is kept waiting for a significant length of time and has to leave before being seen.

Version History

Date	Changes Made	Owner
26/09/13	Policy creation	Louise Hatton
29/01/14	Amended FTA/SNC max to 3 from 2 (according to LAT)	Louise Hatton
11/03/14	Format errors	Sumeet Sonigra
27/09/14	Policy review - Added standard FTA charges into policy	Louise Hatton
25/10/16	Policy review – amended FTA/SNC max to 2 from 3 (according to LAT). Renamed policy from FTA/SNC Policy to Missed Appointment Policy.	Jake Winters
28/11/16	Amended private FTA charge for dentists from £1.50 to £2.00 per minute.	Jake Winters