

# SCRIPT FOR RECALLING PATIENTS AFTER DELAYS DUE TO COVID



For the states of Australia who have experienced substantial lock downs, it is not uncommon to have put a temporary pause on your recall strategy.

Once you are ready to bring this important system back into operation and contact patients who may not have seen you for 1-2 years, there are a couple of considerations to keep in mind.

## **1. Avoid filling your schedule with recalls.**

A month of recalls won't generate the income that your practice needs to cover usual expenses. And, your reception staff will be inclined to put these recall patients in the schedule at the very next availability, because they are aware of the wait your patients have already endured.

A suggestion is to run a report on how many #012 – examinations you would normally see in a year without the impact of COVID, say in 2019. Then divide that number by 12 (12 months) and again by 4 (4 weeks). This will give you a rough indication of the amount of time you need to put aside in your schedule for recalls. You may wish to add a few more slots to accommodate the fact that you are trying to get through a back-log of patients.

Go to your appointment book and pre-block your schedule with these recall appointment slots. These can be moved around to accommodate the patient's needs. Once a recall appointment is made, you swap out the pre-scheduled slot and delete it.

The key is that once all the recall slots have been used, or booked, don't book any more recalls in even if there is space in the appointment book. You will need more productive appointments for those spaces.

Any patient that is booked in two weeks or longer, let them know you will call them should a sooner appointment become available. Use a system to flag these patients easily in your system so they can be quickly identified and called to fill in gaps that may appear in your book.

## **2. Don't send one big batch. Break it down.**

If you send your past 1-2 years' worth of recall reminders in one hit then you run the risk of the receptionist becoming overwhelmed with the number of calls that come through.

A suggestion is to start sending out your reminders as per usual but then add patients from your delayed-recall list in batches until you have contacted everyone.

# SCRIPT

When speaking with a patient who you have not contacted for a period of time and recall them back into the practice, an effective way to approach the call is to make it more conversational.

Usually, it is a notification call. For example, ***“Hi there Tim, just contacting you to let you know that it has been 6-months since your last visit. Can I help you organise an appointment for your regular check-up and cleaning?”***

Instead, try something like this:

***“Hi Tim, it’s Julie from your dental practice, how are you?”***

***“As you know, dental services have suffered delays due to COVID lock downs and restrictions, so I am thrilled to be able to call you today. How has your dental health been over the past couple of years?”***

Then have a friendly, helpful conversation with your patient about where they find themselves at dentally. Provide advice, reassurance and schedule the appropriate time. Let them know that you will call them should any sooner appointment come up.

This kind of call will take longer than the usual recall notification call, so do allow time for them. Avoid trying to get through the calls as quickly as possible. We want to know whether adjustments to the length of appointment is needed to treat any concerns that the patient has developed over the time we could not see them. We want to avoid the scenario of making them wait for a long time for their recall appointment and then making them wait even longer to get a problem sorted.

Make a handful of calls a day until the task is complete.