

A randomized controlled trial of SMS text messages as appointment reminders in the pediatric dental setting

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Research supported by Healthy Smiles, Healthy Children: The Foundation of the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry and 3M ESPE through the 2009 3M ESPE Preventative Pediatric Dentistry Postdoctoral Research Fellowship

Purpose: To determine the effectiveness of SMS (short message service) text messages as appointment reminders in pediatric dental settings.

Methods: From the patient pool of the University of Washington Pediatric Dentistry Clinic, 562 caregiver/child pairs who met study eligibility criteria were invited to participate in this randomized controlled trial. Three hundred eighteen (57%) were randomly allocated to receive a text message (Dentrix software) (n=158) or a voice message (control group) (n=160) as an appointment reminder. Chi square tests to identify unbalanced distribution of demographic variables between groups and logistic regression analysis to evaluate differences in no-show attendance between groups were performed ($P < .05$).

Results: Text and voice message groups were not statistically significantly different with respect to child age, insurance type, family size, primary language spoken at home, ethnicity, caregiver relationship, type of telephone used, or most suitable reminder type. Groups did differ with respect to caregiver age ($P = .046$): younger caregivers were more likely to be non-attendees than older caregivers ($P = .02$). The voice message group had a lower no-show attendance (8.2%) than the text message group (17.7%) ($P = .01$). Unadjusted odds ratio (OR) for type of appointment reminder and no-show attendance was 2.41 ($P = .01$); after adjustment for caregiver age, OR=2.12 ($P = .04$).

Conclusions: Text message reminders may not be the preferred method of appointment reminder for patients in a university pediatric dental clinic. Future studies should investigate the effect of text message reminders when limited to patients who self-select that reminder type and in patient populations outside the university setting.

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This study was supported by the US Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Adminis-