An investigation of the demographic and time characteristics associated with appointment attendance at the Griffith University Dental Clinic

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Patient non-attendance can negatively impact upon clinical productivity and can prolong appointment waiting times for all patients. Patients who repeatedly fail to attend (FTA) or cancel appointments will continue to delay dental treatment and diagnosis, which is necessary for the maintenance of good oral health. This study examines demographic and time characteristics associated with appointment non-attendance at Griffith University Dental Clinic (GUDC) and compares the demographics of emergency and non-emergency patients. The study also investigates the demographics associated with repeat attendance of emergency appointments and further appointments following emergency dental treatment.

A total of 58 622 appointment entries booked at the GUDC in the years 2011 and 2012 were analysed. Appointment status, patient demography and time characteristics associated with each appointment, were collected from the computer patient management system and statistical analysis was completed using IBM SPSS v 21. Bivariate analysis was conducted to determine the significance of difference between cancelled, failed to attend (FTA) and attended appointments for each of the demographic and time characteristics. A separate analysis was conducted for emergency appointments. Patient characteristics associated with repeat attendance of emergency appointments and the booking of follow up appointments were also assessed.

A total of 39 917 (68.1%) appointments were attended, 13 666 (22.8%) were cancelled and 5339 (9.1%) were FTA. Differences in attendance rates were statistically significant for all demographic and time characteristics investigated (p < 0.01). Attended appointments were lowest amongst private patients 10 645 (64.0%) and patients aged 25 to 34 years; 5351 (60.8%). Males 2256 (9.1%) and patients residing outside of the Gold Coast 387 (12.3%), had the highest FTA percentages, as did appointments booked on a Monday; 1441 (10.2%), appointments booked from 5.30 pm to 7.00 pm; 999 (10.6%) and endodontic appointments 304 (10.2%). Males, patients aged 16 to 24 and private patients were most likely to book emergency appointments. Public patients and those aged over 35 years were more likely to book more than one emergency appointment and to book a further follow-up appointment following emergency treatment.

Patients most likely to fail to attend an appointment are males, private patients and those younger in age. Appointments booked on a Monday or late in the afternoon are most likely to be cancelled or FTA and emergency patients are more likely to be male, younger in age and private patients.

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