

# Impact of same-day appointments on patient satisfaction with general practice appointment systems

Fiona Sampson, Mark Pickin, Alicia O'Gathain, Stephen Goodall and Chris Salisbury

## ABSTRACT

Following recent concerns about patients' inability to book appointments in advance, this study examined the relationship between the proportion of GP appointments reserved for same-day booking, and patient satisfaction with appointment systems. In a survey of 12 825 patients in 47 practices, it was found that a 10% increase in the proportion of same-day appointments was associated with an 8% reduction in the proportion of patients satisfied. Practices should be wary of increasing the level of same-day appointments to meet access targets.

### Keywords

appointments and schedules; family practice; health services accessibility; patient satisfaction; primary health care.

## INTRODUCTION

Recent policy initiatives related to government targets for primary care access in *The NHS Plan*,<sup>1</sup> such as *Advanced Access*,<sup>2</sup> have led to changes in the numbers of appointments that are reserved for patients booking on the day (same-day appointments).<sup>3</sup> This has led to high-profile criticisms that patients are less able to book appointments in advance,<sup>4,5</sup> a particular concern for certain groups, such as older patients,<sup>6</sup> and those with chronic conditions.<sup>7,8</sup> There is also uncertainty about whether the success of these initiatives is related to the level of deprivation of the practice population.<sup>9</sup> A recent evaluation of *Advanced Access* showed no difference in patient satisfaction with the appointment system between *Advanced Access* and control practices.<sup>9</sup> However, there was considerable overlap between initiatives used by *Advanced Access* and control practices.<sup>9</sup> Since difficulties in booking appointments in advance have been a focus of concern,<sup>1</sup> this study has examined the relationship between the proportion of GP appointments reserved for the same day and patient satisfaction with appointment systems, regardless of practices' *Advance Access* status.

## METHOD

Data from the recent evaluation of *Advanced Access* were used, described in detail elsewhere.<sup>9</sup> The data were a comparison of 48 general practices selected from 12 primary care trusts (PCTs) in England. The study made use of two components of this evaluation: a survey of practices and a survey of patients. The survey of practices undertaken in 2004 involved 391 practices from 12 PCTs purposefully selected to be representative of England.<sup>9</sup> This provided data on the numbers of GP appointments offered in each practice, both bookable in advance and same-day only. The patient survey involved 12 825 adult patients attending 47 of the practices, undertaken in 2005.<sup>9</sup> This provided data on patient satisfaction with the practice appointment system.

### Analysis

Responses to a question about 'overall satisfaction with the appointment system', which had been

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# Appointment Systems In General Practice

**Yicheng Fang**



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### **Table of Contents Appointment Systems In General Practice**

1. Understanding the eBook Appointment Systems In General Practice
  - The Rise of Digital Reading Appointment Systems In General Practice
  - Advantages of eBooks Over Traditional Books
2. Identifying Appointment Systems In General Practice
  - Exploring Different Genres
  - Considering Fiction vs. Non-Fiction
  - Determining Your Reading Goals
3. Choosing the Right eBook Platform
  - Popular eBook Platforms
  - Features to Look for in an Appointment Systems In General Practice
  - User-Friendly Interface
4. Exploring eBook Recommendations from Appointment Systems In General Practice
  - Personalized Recommendations

- Appointment Systems In General Practice User Reviews and Ratings
- Appointment Systems In General Practice and Bestseller Lists
- 5. Accessing Appointment Systems In General Practice Free and Paid eBooks
  - Appointment Systems In General Practice Public Domain eBooks
  - Appointment Systems In General Practice eBook Subscription Services
  - Appointment Systems In General Practice Budget-Friendly Options
- 6. Navigating Appointment Systems In General Practice eBook Formats
  - ePub, PDF, MOBI, and More
  - Appointment Systems In General Practice Compatibility with Devices
  - Appointment Systems In General Practice Enhanced eBook Features
- 7. Enhancing Your Reading Experience
  - Adjustable Fonts and Text Sizes of Appointment Systems In General Practice
  - Highlighting and Note-Taking Appointment Systems In General Practice
  - Interactive Elements Appointment Systems In General Practice
- 8. Staying Engaged with Appointment Systems In General Practice
  - Joining Online Reading Communities
  - Participating in Virtual Book Clubs
  - Following Authors and Publishers Appointment Systems In General Practice
- 9. Balancing eBooks and Physical Books Appointment Systems In General Practice
  - Benefits of a Digital Library
  - Creating a Diverse Reading Collection Appointment Systems In General Practice
- 10. Overcoming Reading Challenges
  - Dealing with Digital Eye Strain
  - Minimizing Distractions
  - Managing Screen Time
- 11. Cultivating a Reading Routine Appointment Systems In General Practice
  - Setting Reading Goals Appointment Systems In General Practice
  - Carving Out Dedicated Reading Time
- 12. Sourcing Reliable Information of Appointment Systems In General Practice
  - Fact-Checking eBook Content of Appointment Systems In General Practice

- Distinguishing Credible Sources
- 13. Promoting Lifelong Learning
  - Utilizing eBooks for Skill Development
  - Exploring Educational eBooks
- 14. Embracing eBook Trends
  - Integration of Multimedia Elements
  - Interactive and Gamified eBooks

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