Prompts to encourage appointment attendance for people with serious mental illnesses: a Cochrane review

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Background

Prompts to encourage attendance at clinics are often used in day-to-day practice by diligent carers of people with mental health problems. These may take the form of telephone prompting, financial incentives or issuing a copy of the referral letter to the appointee.

Objectives

To estimate the effects of simple prompting to encourage attendance at clinics.

Search strategy


Selection criteria

All relevant randomised (or quasi-randomised) studies comparing the addition of ‘prompts’ to standard care for those with serious mental illnesses such as schizophrenia. Prompts had the stated purpose of encouraging attendance or contact with mental health teams and could be text-based, electronic, by telephone call, by personal visit, or could employ financial or other rewards.

Data collection and analysis

Studies and data were independently selected and extracted. For homogeneous dichotomous data the random effects relative risk (RR), the 95% confidence intervals (CI) and, where appropriate, the number needed to treat (NNT) were calculated on an intention-to-treat basis. For continuous data the reviewers calculated weighted mean differences.

Results

Main Result: Only three trials were identified (n=597).

Any vs no prompt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome: Did not attend appointment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone vs text orientation statement prompt</td>
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<tr>
<td>RR (95% CI)</td>
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When telephone prompts were compared with text-based prompts, the latter, in the form of an ‘orientation statement’ may be somewhat more effective than the telephone prompt (RR 1.9 CI 0.98 to 3.8).

Text letter vs text orientation statement prompt

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One last study (n=120) compared a standard letter prompt with a letter ‘orientation statement’. Results did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance (RR 1.6 CI 0.9 to 2.9).

Discussion

A simple prompt to attend clinic, very close to the time of the appointment may encourage attendance.

An orientation-type letter may be more effective than a telephone prompt.

Conclusions

There are still too limited data to recommend clinic prompts as routine. Recognising that this simple intervention may have major implications for health service providers, it is justified to undertake a large, definitive study in this area.

Please see poster: PROMPTS: a randomised controlled trial of prompts to attend clinic for people with serious mental illness.

Reference