

Doctors can bill for missed appointments

Question: Are doctors allowed to bill you for missing an appointment?

Answer: The American Medical Association policy states that a physician may charge a patient for a missed appointment or for one not cancelled 24-hours in advance if the patient is fully advised the physician will make such a charge. Charging a patient for a missed appointment is intended for those who really abuse the system.

Missed appointments can cost a practice in three different ways. First you take the lost revenue from the missed appointment itself, then you add the cost of employees who spend time scheduling and rescheduling the appointment and making follow-up calls with the patient, and then there's the empty time that otherwise could have been filled with other patients. Most practices allot 45 to 60 minutes for a new patient. If the patient misses that appointment, the practice could have seen anywhere from three to 10 people for chiropractic care during that time.

Unfortunately it is a handful of regular patients and occasional new patients that abuse the system in every doctor's facility. As a physician it is the most disrespectful act a patient can do. I have low tolerance for patients that continually not show up for appointments and do not call to reschedule. It is totally understandable that changes in plans occur or we can even forget once in a while but habitual tardiness or absence without a call does deserve to have a value put on it.

The other side of the coin is a doctor that is not on time, does not show up or is consistently making patients wait extended times beyond their original appointment time. I believe this is equally abusive. I personally feel time is the most cherished entity in the universe. Our office takes pride in keeping a tight and responsible schedule. Ninety percent of the time you never wait more than 5 to ten minutes. Emergencies do occur occasionally and we immediately inform our patients if there will be an extended delay and offer them the option to come back later, to reschedule or wait.

Mutual respect between doctor and patient creates the best environment for a productive and satisfied patient. A large part of caring for people is understanding their needs and this present society is fast paced and multi-tasking at high speed. Even with all the stress and responsibility we carry it is wonderful and responsible to be considerate of your doctor's and your patient's time.

Quote of the week: *"Time is a sort of river of passing events, and strong is its current; no sooner is a thing brought to sight than swept by and another takes its place, and this too will be swept away."* – Marcus Aurelis