



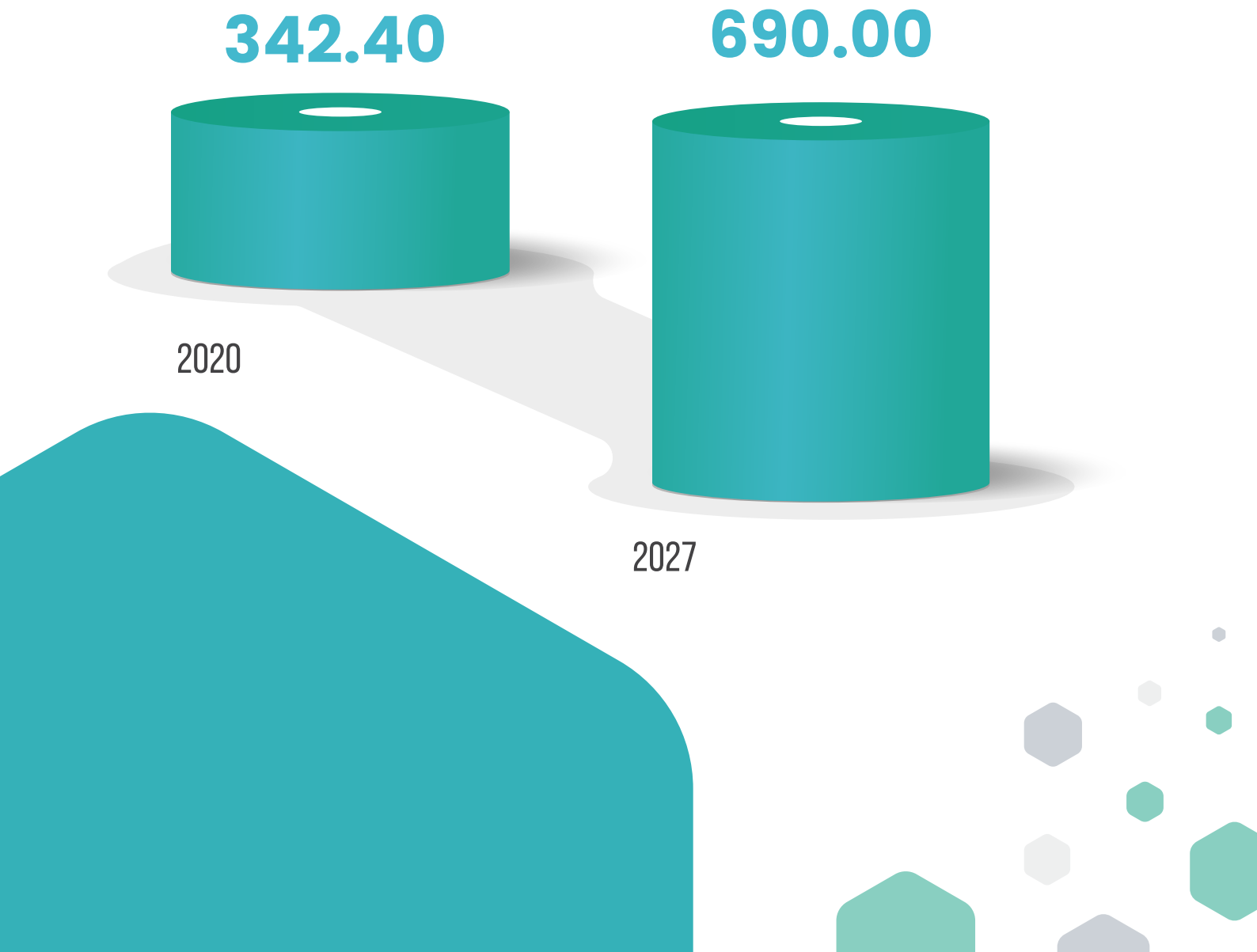
AN ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO PATIENT SCHEDULING

INTRODUCTION

Patient appointment scheduling is most likely the first point of contact for the patient with the service provider. It has a direct bearing not just on patient experience but on your revenues too. It is a simple yet powerful tool of engagement, if deployed in the right manner. Patient scheduling is a complex yet vital procedure.

In the Indian context, you need to have the right blend of technology and human interaction to make the patient feel comfortable. In this ebook, we will explore how to amalgamate these two aspects seamlessly into your patient appointment scheduling system.

Spending on Scheduling (USD Millions)



ENCOURAGE PATIENT SELF SCHEDULING

Due to Covid-19, there has been a surge in technology usage in day-to-day living. This trend has brought about a demand for self-scheduling like never before.

Self-scheduling is quick, easy and accessible on a 24x7 basis, making it a great choice for patients to book their appointments.

Information Sought by Patients for Self Scheduling



Doctor's credentials



Years of experience



Work timings/ OPD timings



Availability slots



Consultation charges.



LEVERAGE THE POTENTIAL OF TELECONSULTATION

Hospitals should harness the potential of teleconsultation to optimize scheduling. Teleconsultations can help quickly understand the issue the patient is facing.

Specifically, teleconsultations can provide quick solutions in certain scenarios. It will also help hospitals use their slots optimally.

EXAMPLE

- An 11-year old patient, weighing 45 kgs wanted an appointment with a GP immediately.
- The parents informed that the kid was wrongly given a BP medicine.
- The patient was immediately connected to the doctor telephonically for issue resolution and next steps.
- After which a review visit was scheduled to check on the patients progress.



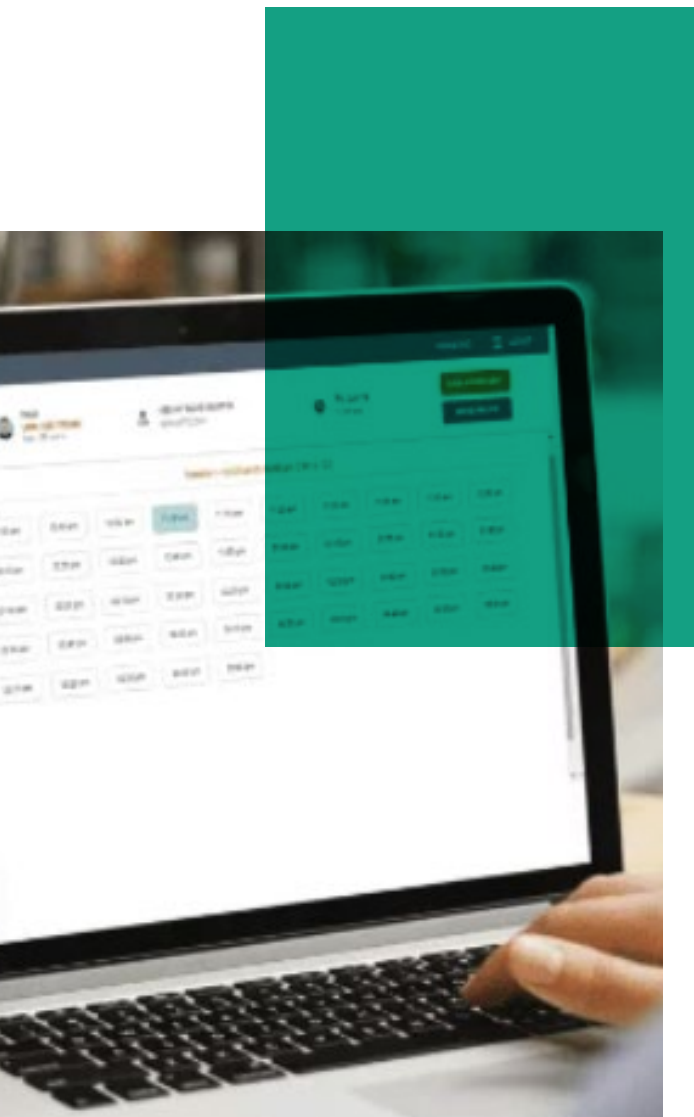
IMPLEMENT STRATEGIC SCHEDULING

While scheduling, many hospitals face the issue of inconsistent time spent on each consultation. For example, certain consultations may take 15 minutes whereas others may get completed in 5 minutes. The issue can be addressed by using the right scheduling method.

Another common issue, specifically, in the case of Orthopaedic doctors, Cardiac doctors etc., is that the doctors may get delayed for OP consultations due to emergency cases.

This issue can be addressed by steps such as commencing the OP rounds slightly later based on doctors' schedules to account for IP case rounds/ emergency cases.

There should also be 10 - 15 minute slots every hour as a buffer to cover for any delays or walk-in patients. The hospital can also have a stringent policy that walk-ins will be seen only after all the appointment patients.







Check out the different types of scheduling methods in the bonus section

USE APPOINTMENT REMINDERS

In the case of follow-up visits, there is a tendency for patients to forget the date and time. Through appointment reminders either through SMS or mail or phone calls, patients can be provided necessary reminders about the appointments. Proactive reminders can help ascertain if they would be able to make it or would require a re-schedule.

★ Pro-Tips:

Information to Include in Appointment Reminders

-  Physician's name
-  Appointment time and date
-  Location
-  Optional: Essential steps to take before the appointment (such as fasting or drinking liquids)

Do you know?

BestDoc's appointment solutions can help increase advance appointments up to 60% and bring down no-shows to 15%





CONSIDER OUTSOURCING BOOKINGS TO A CALL CENTRE

Outsourcing bookings to a call center can provide time savings. It also gives flexibility to patients.

For example: If a large proportion of your clientele falls under the category of “Senior citizens”, a 24x7 call centre can allow them to talk to personnel for appointment scheduling whenever there’s an emergency.



Availability of both online and telephonic calling facility



Understanding of your specific requirements with respect to strategic scheduling preferences



Free up Front office time to attend to patients who are present in your facility



Possibility of telephonic triage for cases that are triggered as “in pain and requiring immediate problem resolution.”

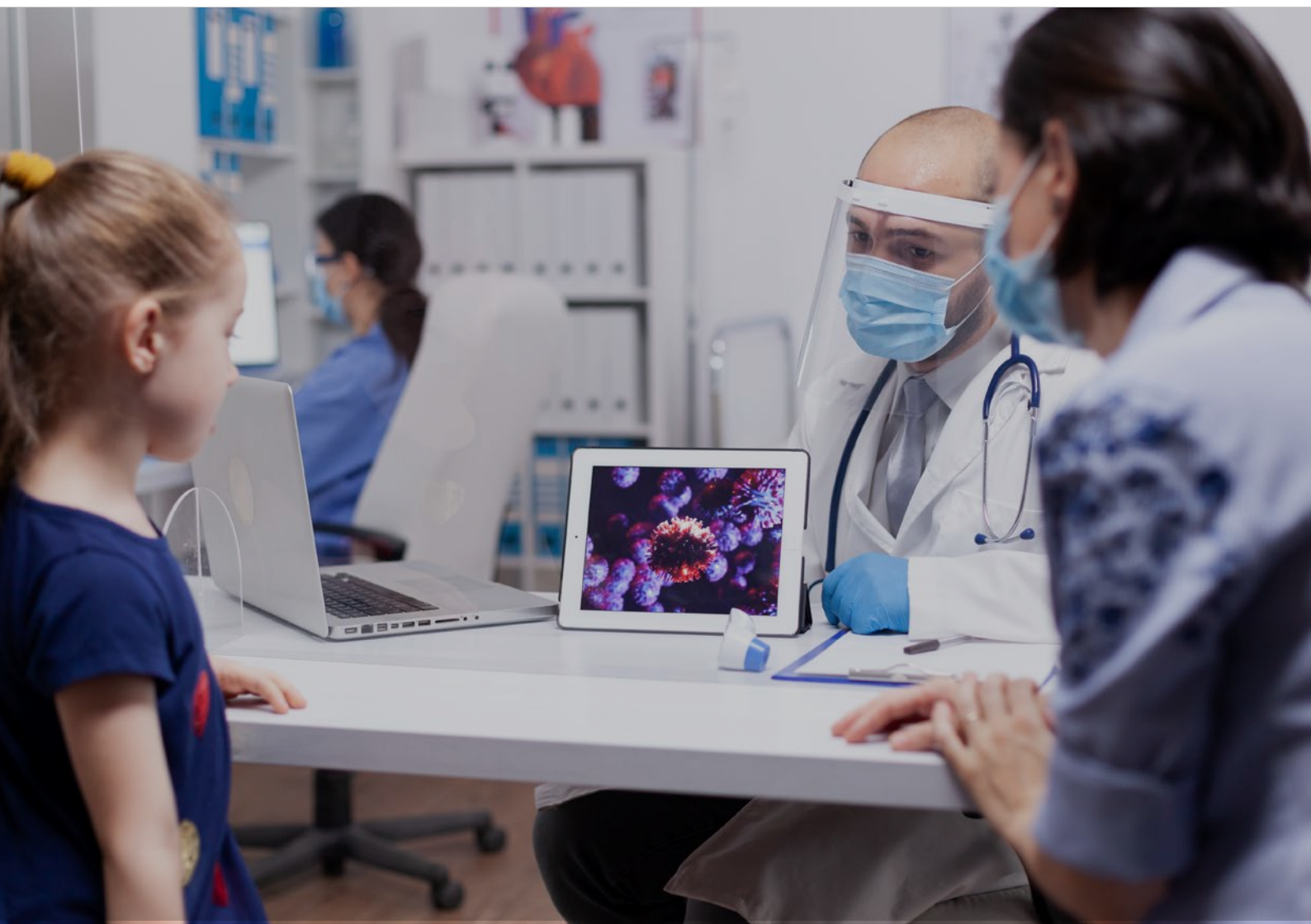
Do you know?

A trained call center professional can save 1.2 minutes per appointment booking as compared to front-office staff?

USE SUPPORTING RESOURCES OPTIMALLY

To further optimise physician time, it would make sense to allocate other resources for procedures like taking BP, height, weight so the doctor has the required metrics with him prior consultation. Also in certain cases it might make sense to provide a standardised detail to the support staff.

For example: If a child has to be given vaccination, the hospital can either deploy an exclusive vaccination wing within Paediatric division or provide the necessary know-how to Front office and nursing staff to determine what vaccination the child has to be provided and which brands are standardised by the hospital drug committee. So the patient attendant can purchase that and show up at the doctors room with all necessary material to save physician time.



STANDARDIZE PROCESSES

Standardising processes can take away a lot of ambiguity around what needs to be done, patient's rights and responsibilities, and set clear expectations between the patient and the provider.

For scaling up the patient appointment scheduling process, it would make sense to standardise your scheduling templates, appointment urgency, and entire workflow from appointment scheduling to follow-up.

For example: A hospital can set a standard rule that walk-in patients are going to be seen only after all the appointment patients. This gives clarity to patients on what they can expect.

Alternatively, suppose a patient would like to meet Doctor A and has come as a walk-in. The front office can clearly let the patient know that they will have to wait for nearly 2 hours. If the patient is comfortable meeting up with Doctor B, a slot is available in 30 minutes. This will make things convenient for patients.

6 TYPES OF PATIENT APPOINTMENT SCHEDULING METHODS

1 Time-specified Scheduling:

- Appointments are scheduled at a specific time
- Helps minimize the waiting times for patients

2 Wave Scheduling

- Three or four patients are scheduled every 30 minutes
- Patients are seen based on the order in which they arrive
- Ideal for doctors who have many patients in their schedule

3 Modified Wave Scheduling:

- Patients are scheduled for the first half an hour of every hour
- The other half is kept open for walk-ins
- Ideal for practices with unpredictable visit lengths

4 Double Booking:

- Involves booking two patients for the same slot
- Can help reduce wasting doctors' slots
- Comes with a risk of increasing patient waiting times and making them frustrated

5 Clustering Scheduling:

- Patients with similar complaints are grouped together
- Helps doctors stay organized and reduces their mental workload

6 Integrated Scheduling

- Involves clubbing appointment slots for long examinations or short follow-ups
- Long examinations can be clubbed, say, during the first half of the day
- Short follow-ups can be clubbed during the second half
- Helps doctors stay in the right mindset
- Scheduling staff can forecast flow and waiting times more accurately

PATIENT APPOINTMENT SCHEDULING CHECKLIST

Buffer Slots

Between commencing of OPD timings and doctors' schedules to account for IP case rounds/ emergency cases/ delays

10-15 minute every hour to cover for any delays or walk-in patients

Reserved Slots

For telephonic consultations/ video consultations

For allowing Medical Representatives in the hospital premises

To factor in potential delays

Policies & Processes

Choose the type of scheduling method that works for your hospital

Make standardized scheduling templates

Create detailed workflow from appointment scheduling to follow-up

Share workflows with relevant staff members

Doctors' Adherence

Share weekly OPD reports regarding adherence to schedule for transparency

Highlight frequent delays by specific doctors to the Medical Superintendent



CONCLUSION

With the above practical solutions and methods, you can make your patient appointment scheduling system a touchpoint for superlative patient experience and improving employee efficiency with enhanced revenues, a win-win for all involved.

ABOUT BESTDOC

BestDoc is all about making primary health care smart, convenient, and user-friendly. Our vision is to reimagine health care by creating a perfect experience for everyone.

We strongly believe in using technology and data to drive this change and create a better experience for all stakeholders of the healthcare sector.

We are progressing towards our vision with our range of products and reputed clients