

Evidence Update

Summary of a Cochrane Review

Tuberculosis Series

Does reminding TB patients about upcoming clinic appointments, or contacting them if they miss appointments, improve adherence?

Patients who receive reminders or tracers if they are late have better adherence to treatment than those who don't.

Background

Various communication strategies (letters, phone calls, emails and text messages) have been tested to remind tuberculosis patients to attend their future appointments, or to trace patients if they miss appointments. Appointments may be for screening, treatment or chemoprophylaxis.

Inclusion criteria

Studies:

Randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and quasi-RCTs.

Participants:

People who require treatment or prophylaxis for tuberculosis, in any setting.

Intervention:

Actions to remind patients to take their tuberculosis medication or attend appointments (reminders), or to contact patients who have missed an appointment (late patient tracers).

Outcomes:

Completion of tuberculosis screening, diagnostics, prophylaxis or treatment; attendance at clinic appointments.

Results

- Nine trials involving 5257 participants were included; seven RCTs and two quasi-RCTs. Three trials assessed late patient tracers and six trials assessed reminders. Two were adequately concealed.
- For missed appointments, follow up letters reminding patients to collect their drugs improved treatment completion when compared to patients not getting reminders (relative risk 0.44, 95% confidence interval 0.24 to 0.83; 200 participants).
- For missed appointments, follow up with a home visit and health education improved adherence (RR 0.21, 95% CI 0.11 to 0.43; 480 participants).
- Automated telephone reminders increased the number of people returning for skin test reading (7% failed to return) compared to no reminders (12% failed to return; OR 1.71, $P < 0.05$).
- Both a telephone call reminder (RR 0.18, 95% CI 0.07 to 0.44; 157 participants) and home visit reminder (RR 0.14, 95% CI 0.05 to 0.39; 156 participants) improved attendance at the final clinic appointment in school children prescribed chemoprophylaxis.
- There were no significant differences in non-attendance at clinic appointments between different types of reminders.

Authors' conclusions

Implications for practice:

Patients who received reminders or late patient tracers had better adherence to treatment than those who do not. Practical issues need to be considered when choosing the type of strategy to be recommended in different settings.

Implications for research:

More good quality trials are needed to assess different late patient tracer and reminder systems in different settings.