initial trials of these stents \(^5\) \(^6\) seem promising but as ever we await the evaluation of long-term outcome studies.

A. Evans
R. G. Davies*
Cardiff, UK
*E-mail: richard.davies@cardiffandvale.wales.nhs.uk


doi:10.1093/bja/aen398

Short message service for outpatient data collection

Editor—During an audit of day-case anaesthesia experiences, we used short message service (SMS) as a novel means of outpatient data collection. Patients who had undergone day-case surgical procedures were asked to respond to a simple questionnaire evaluating overall patient satisfaction and pain scores up to 2 days post-procedure.

In the first audit period, patients were provided with a paper-based questionnaire and a stamped addressed envelope. During the second period, patients were given the same questions with instructions of how to reply by SMS to a specified number. Patients able to provide their mobile number before operation were sent a text message reminder after discharge.

Sixty-two patients were included in the postal group with a response rate of 69% (43). Of the 25 patients asked to reply by text, there was a response rate of 40% (10) which increased to 70% (a further 10) when sent a reminder.

Fifty-nine billion text messages were sent in 2007 and 86% of UK adults owned a mobile phone in the same period.\(^1\) SMS has previously been used successfully in healthcare for reasons including appointment reminders,\(^2\) sexual health promotion, contraception reminders,\(^3\) and diabetes education.\(^4\) An Australian study\(^5\) found that almost all patients aged 16–24 with mobile phones would be prepared to use them as a method of communication for research. There is some evidence supporting the use of SMS in healthcare, with a reduction in time to treatment for genital Chlamydia trachomatis with the use of SMS recall\(^6\) and a reduced rate of non-attendance at an ENT outpatient clinic after text message reminders.\(^7\)

Potential advantages of SMS communication for data collection include improved patient convenience, instant results, with reduced paper use, and reduced cost. Limitations on the use of SMS as a form of outpatient communication include maintaining confidentiality, inability to convey large or complicated information, lack of access and understanding, especially in the elderly population, and transfer of cost to patients. We were unable to demonstrate improved response rates with the use of SMS. However, if a mobile phone number is recorded before discharge and an SMS reminder is sent, it may be possible to achieve similar results at greater patient convenience.

A. Roberts*
A. Gorman
Macclesfield, UK
*E-mail: alunroberts@doctors.net.uk

1 OFCOM Annual Communications Market Report. August 2008
2 Dyer O. Patients will be reminded of appointments by text message. Br Med J 2003; 326: 1281
6 Menon-Johansson AS, McNaught F, Mandalia S, Sullivan AK. Texting decreases the time to treatment for genital Chlamydia trachomatis infection. Sex Transm Infect 2006; 82: 49–51

doi:10.1093/bja/aen400