

Text Message Reminders for Probation Appointments

Reducing failure to report rates for those under community supervision

Agency: Santa Barbara County (CA) Probation

Trial Duration: 10/04/16–08/08/17

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Context

For people under community supervision, failure to report (FTR) for supervisory appointments is a technical violation. Reducing FTRs would reduce technical violations and thereby reduce the costs of community supervision.

Key Finding

More appointments were completed when the participant received a text reminder.

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Background

Missed probation appointments represent a loss to both persons on probation and the community; not only is the person not receiving the benefits of their supervision programming, but additional disciplinary actions may follow, such as issuing a warrant and/or a jail stay. Including the cost for each jailed day and expenses for searches, warrants, arrests, and hearings, as well as wasted staff time, the costs of a missed appointment can add up quickly. Text-message reminders have been formally evaluated in many contexts and have shown large increases in appointment attendance. Texting probation-appointment reminders was tested as a tool to reduce FTR rates.

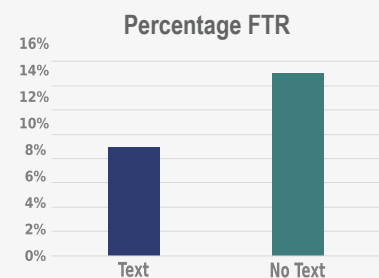
Trial Design

All persons on probation deemed to require medium- or high-risk supervision and who had at least 6 months left on their probation term were invited to participate and possibly receive text reminders. Excluded were those who did not have cellphones or who could not read and comprehend text messages in English or Spanish. Those who agreed to participate were randomly assigned to receive text reminders (intervention) or not receive such reminders

(control). Reminders were sent 24 hours before the probation appointment, in both English and Spanish.

Results

Comparison of the two groups by appointment status found that those getting text reminders (n=53) were less likely to FTR compared with the control group (n=43), who did not get the reminders (p=0.01). Because participants could have been scheduled for several appointments over the 10-month trial duration, additional analyses controlled for multiple appointments and found that the text group was 70% more likely to show up for their appointment (p=0.08). Analyses show that the groups were not similar at baseline; the text group was more likely to be young, and to be male, and less likely to be low violence-risk (all p < 0.001).



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