



# HOW SMS APPOINTMENT REMINDERS SUPPORT SERVICE DELIVERY AND COMMUNICATION IN STUDENT HEALTH

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## Background and Purpose

MTU Medical Centre is based in the Bishopstown Campus of Munster Technological University and provides a low-cost, supplementary GP service to full-time students of MTU. Our service is appointment-based with an average waiting time of 1 week for a routine appointment, however, should a student call with a more urgent issue, we offer further support by the management of a cancellation list.

We use secure patient management software from Clanwilliam-Lanas:

- HealthOne from 2002 to 2025
- Socrates from September 2025 onwards

These software packages feature an SMS messaging service for clinical use.

DNA (Did Not Attend) appointments are slots in a clinic schedule that cannot be used due to a patient not attending the appointment. This affects our service by filling scheduled GP hours which could have been offered to patients on the cancellation list.

## Objective

To investigate how increased communication using SMS reminders has decreased DNA totals each academic year in MTU Medical Centre, allowing us to 1) optimise availability on our schedule and 2) support students in achieving confidence and autonomy in managing their medical appointments.

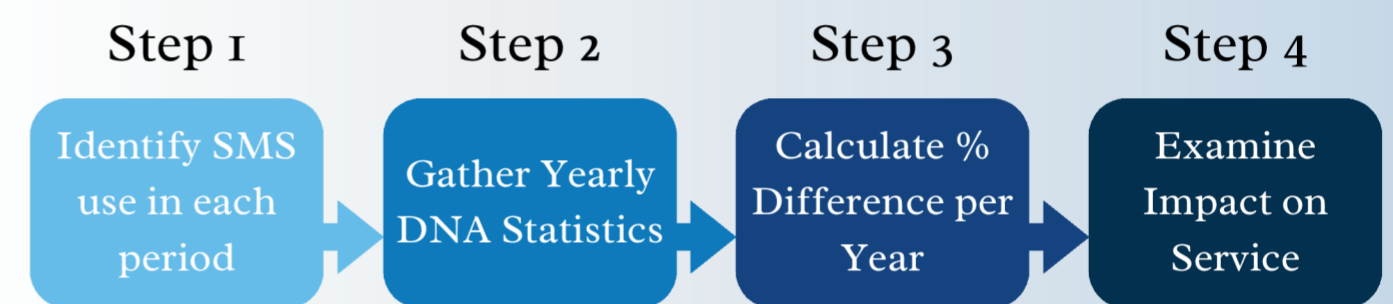
## Methodology

The study examines the total numbers of abandoned appointments in MTU Medical Centre from September to May in the following years:

- AY 2023-24 – before implementation of SMS reminder messages
- AY 2024-25 – after implementation of manually-sent SMS reminders on HealthOne
- AY 2025-26 – after the introduction of automated SMS reminders in Socrates

All figures were collected from HealthOne and Socrates at the end of each respective academic year.

On examining this data, the study will calculate the annual percentage change in missed appointments on the schedule. By analysing the SMS operations in each year, we will discuss the impact of these initiatives on students attending the Medical Centre, and how future improvements to the operations could impact DNA figures in academic years to come.



## Results - 35% overall reduction of DNA appts

Academic Year	Reminder Method Used	System Used	Automated vs Manual SMS	Total DNAs
2023-24	Confirmation email only (at patient request)	HealthOne	No SMS	394
2024-25	Reminder SMS (limited to high-demand clinics)	HealthOne	Manual	245 (<37%)
2025-26	Automated reminder SMS for every appointment	Socrates	Automated	251 (>2%)

## Analysis of SMS Operations - September to May

### 2023-24

- Increased cybersecurity prevention measures affected HealthOne functions
- SMS messaging was no longer operational
- Appt confirmation messages via email were sent by patient request only at time of booking
- High-demand clinics booked weeks in advance were found to have high DNA ratios

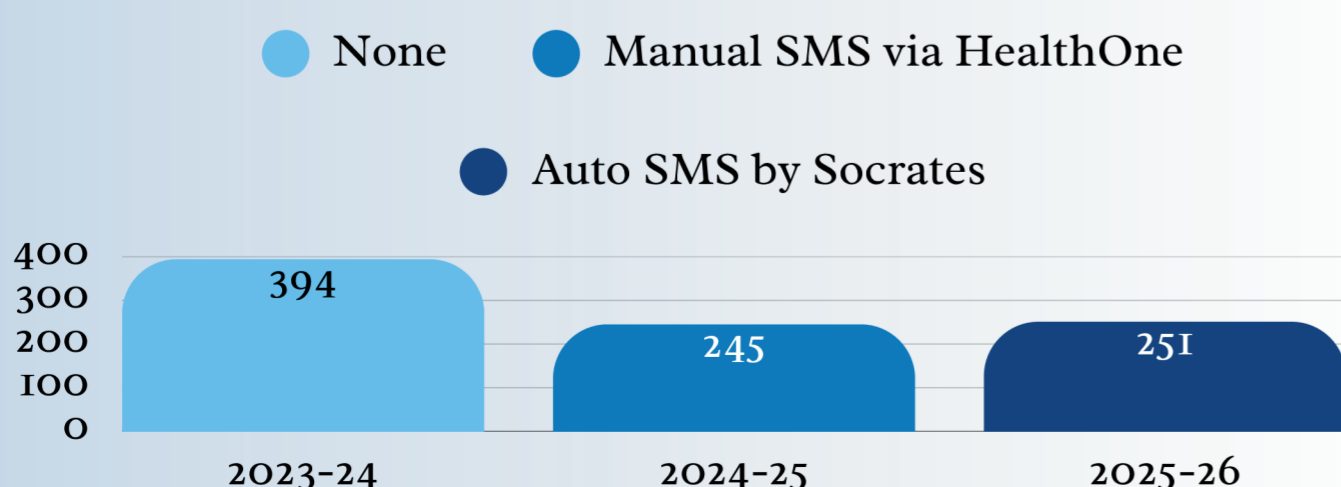
### 2024-25

- SMS service resumed, but automatic bulk messaging was not functional
- Standard templates were implemented for reminders and DNA notification
- SMS reminders were sent manually to patients in these high-demand clinics:
  - the weekly sports and physiotherapy clinics
  - monthly psychiatry clinics
- More students called ahead to rearrange appointments, opening slots in these clinics
- End of year DNA total decreased by 37% compared to 2023-24

### 2025-26

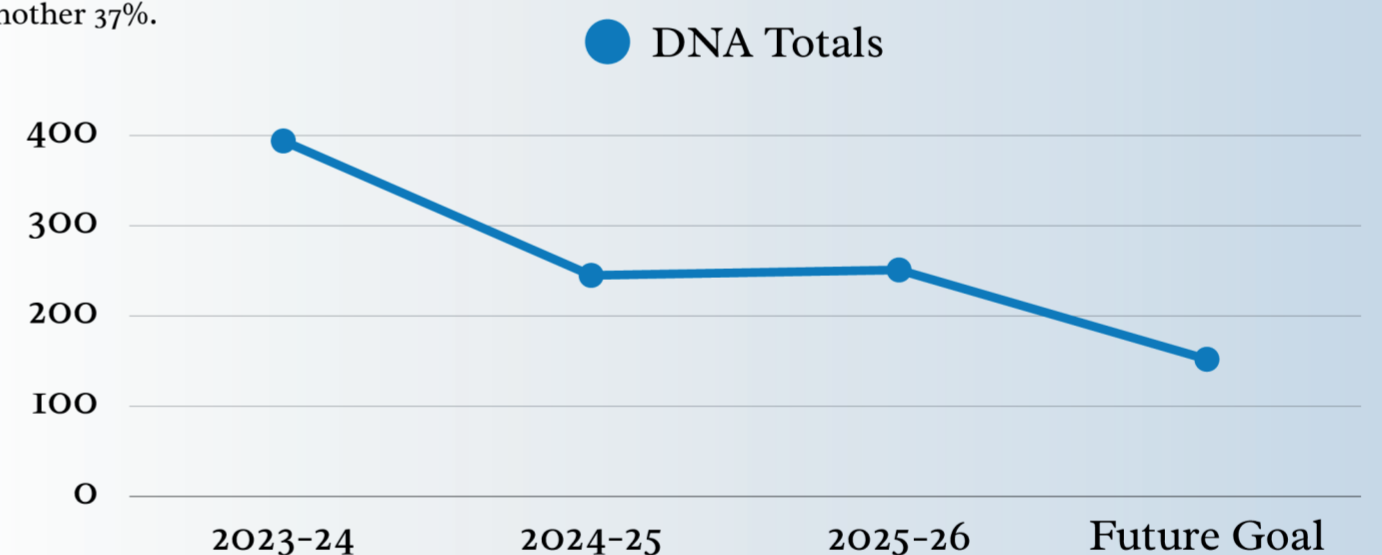
- Socrates replaced HealthOne in September 2025
- Automated SMS was reinstated. A daily SMS schedule was set up in Socrates Server Management, sending alerts for all face-to-face appointments one day in advance at 10am
- Reception observed an increase in calls after 10.00 am, with more students rescheduling unwanted appointments on receipt of their reminder message
- Inconsistencies in SMS delivery were flagged by students: some reminders were not delivered
- This year's DNA total increased 2% despite expanding reminder SMS use

## SMS Reminder Methods vs DNA Totals



## Future Opportunities

As staff gain further experience with Socrates, improvements to operations will follow. On receiving feedback from a student who did not receive his reminder as expected, we investigated the reason. We found that appointments for new healthcare workers had not been added to the SMS setup, and that a chart permission issue was preventing messages from being sent to some patients. Thanks to the communication of this fault, we have now remedied this for next September. Given the drop in DNAs since commencing the reminder schedules, we predict that by addressing this issue, we can expect another drop in future DNA figures. As such, we have set a future goal to reduce our yearly total by another 37%.



## Conclusion - Impact on Student Autonomy and Communication

Reception staff noted a new pattern in student correspondence when contacting us to cancel or reschedule their visits. Many of 2025-26's cancellations occurred between 10am and 12pm of the day before the appointment: as the SMS schedule triggers a day in advance at 10am, this is clear evidence of the SMS initiative positively affecting student-service communication.

Our SMS reminders positively impact MTU student health:

- Many younger students aged 17-20 are experiencing their first independent living situation in MTU - knowing that they can expect an advance reminder reassures students who may be prone to forgetting appointment times.
- Students found that the SMS had flagged conflicts with compulsory labs and exams, and some have expressed gratitude to staff at the front desk for the reminder in advance.
- Earlier slots became available on the schedule, allowing other MTU students to avail of a sooner appointment ahead of the normal wait time of 1 week.

Effective, timely communication prompts reciprocation from students, which improves any university administrative function. By communicating directly to students using a medium they are more comfortable with (SMS/smartphone), students feel empowered to manage their appointments themselves by cancelling or rescheduling visits to accommodate their busy academic schedule. In creating a welcoming attitude to appointment cancellations, the SMS initiative not only helps the Medical Centre schedule, but also supports students to take charge of their healthcare independently.

## References:

- MTU Student Services End of Year Report 2023-24
- MTU Student Services End of Year Report 2024-25
- MTU Student Services End of Year Report 2025-26
- HealthOne Statistics Reports 2023-2025
- Socrates Statistics Reports 2025-2026