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A no-show affects all

By Jeff Troth, MEDDAC PAO

It may not seem like a big deal to miss an appointment at a military hospital. After all isn't "free" healthcare a benefit of being in the military, or married to someone in the military?

"Medical care is a part of your military benefit," said Maj. Jason Anderson, the officer in charge of Evans Army Community Hospital's Clinical Services Department. "But, getting to your scheduled appointment is the one point where our patients play a huge part in our access to care system."

Anderson said that life happens, and it is not always possible to get to a scheduled appointment.

"If someone can't make an appointment they need to cancel it," he said. "The sooner they cancel the better because then we can fill that slot with someone else who needs it."

Evans beneficiaries have four ways that they can cancel an appointment. First is to call the clinic. Or they can call the Patient Access System (appointment line) at 526-CARE (2273). Third, TRICARE Online can not only be used to schedule an appointment, but also to cancel it. The fourth option is to cancel via phone when the automated AudioCARE calls a few days before the appointment.

According to Anderson, the hospital and its patients suffer when someone is a no-show – an individual who misses or is late to an appointment without cancelling or rescheduling it.

"If we can't rebook it, access across the board decreases," said Anderson. "If the next patient is early, the provider can see them. But this doesn't normally happen."

When someone is a no-show, it means that two people missed out on that appointment. But Anderson said that it affects much more than two patients. Because the no-show individual reschedules to get the care he or she missed, another patient isn't able to get that appointment.

“For a habitual no-show they can take up to five slots with rebooking their appointments,” Anderson said. “This is denying several of our patients the opportunity to receive the care they need.”

A no-show affects the hospital in more ways than just a loss of productivity and in decreased appointment slots. It also hurts the hospital financially.

“Although there is no exchange of money at our clinics for an appointment,” said Emma Alonzo, Evans access to care manager. “There is a cost associated with missed appointments.”

Evans like all other military treatment facilities receives money based on the number of patients treated. For a regular doctor appointment that is missed the hospital loses \$86; missed specialty appointments cost the hospital \$169. For Fiscal Year 2015, Evans had almost 7,000 no-shows (almost 5 percent of all appointments). The money lost due to patient no-shows could have been used to hire more providers or improve patient services.

“We want to partner with our beneficiaries to solve this no-show problem,” Anderson said. “It hurts beneficiaries and the hospital because it is all tied together.”