

What if the patient is crying?



"I can hear how upset you are, and can only apologise for the upset, distress and worry this delay has caused you. We will be back in touch as soon as possible."



Only give an explanation if the patient asks for one, as it may come across as justification. If you are asked, the simpler the explanation, the better:



"unfortunately, due to circumstances beyond our control, we have a technical failure and are unable to carry out the scan. We're doing our best to rectify the situation."

What if a referring professional gets angry?



Again, acknowledge their emotion and say you share it. Give a brief explanation if asked for one.



"I can hear how angry you are"

(slight pause)



We're angry/frustrated too. It's really distressing for the patients, and we sincerely apologise for this happening...unfortunately, we've had an unforeseen technical issue which we're doing our best to ensure doesn't happen again. We'll be in touch with the patient as soon as we can with a new appointment time - please rest assured we are doing all we can."



Please don't take anger personally, even if the patient is swearing.

You're the bearer of bad news; the patient is angry or upset about what's happened, not with you.

A delay in diagnosis or treatment is really hard to handle, especially from a centre they have great trust in.

Try not to give an explanation unless it's asked for, as it can feel like defensiveness and an attempt to justify what's happened.



In summary:
acknowledge their feelings, and apologise for the delay.



More help...
This guide offers more tips on how best to communicate in these difficult situations.

What if the patient has mentioned making a formal complaint?

Only when the emotion has been named, along with an apology, will the patient start to calm down.

"We are so sorry this has happened and sincerely apologise for putting you through this. We will be in touch with a new appointment as soon as we can."

Following this acknowledgement, apologise.

2

"I can hear how angry you are about the delay..."

1

It is important to acknowledge the patient's anger by naming it.

"I can hear how angry you are - and hear your worries, and you're right, it's not acceptable. We can only apologise for you having to go through this, we'll be back in touch as soon as we can."

(pause for response)

"...and I'm really sorry, but unfortunately the appointment we had scheduled for you is one of those that's been affected. We are doing everything we can to get you a new appointment date as soon as possible."

(slight pause)

"We are so sorry to be contacting you. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances, we are having to postpone many appointments for PET/CT scans..."

(phone icon)

4
Say out loud the emotion you hear from the patient, including anger, and empathise with the experience

3
Use words like, 'delay', 'postpone', or 'reschedule', instead of 'cancelation' - they are less negative

2
Use a word or phrase like, 'unfortunately' or 'I'm afraid' or 'I'm so sorry', before mentioning the 'cancelation'

1
Apologise first, and use 'we', rather than 'I', whenever possible
(like cancelling appointments)
Breaking bad news