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## Timely technology helps patients get the message

By Brad Howarth

IF SMS messaging company MessageNet has its way, Australians will soon have fewer excuses for missing their medical appointments. The Melbourne company is forging relationships with Australian medical software developers to promote its technology for sending and receiving SMS from medical staff's PCs.

For Daniela Viola, the office manager at the Darling Street Health Centre in the Sydney suburb of Balmain, use of SMS to confirm customer appointments is saving her up to an hour a week in phone calls.

"I used to have to call everyone beforehand," Ms Viola says. "But since we got this it's been really good - when they reply it comes up on the screen whether they are coming or they are cancelling. I used to have to leave messages because nobody would pick up their phone, and lots of people wouldn't call back."

Ms Viola says people are more responsive to a text message than a phone call because it is less of an interruption.

She says the use of text messages was initially resisted by older patients, who she describes as being less familiar with the technology. However, she says these reservations have been overcome as they have grown accustomed to SMS as a communications medium.

Because the Darling Street Health Centre also provides consultations in naturopathy, osteopathy, acupuncture and other health services, it hosts many consulting practitioners, some of whom are only on the premises for one consultation each day.

Ms Viola says that by having a more accurate idea of which customers are cancelling, she can provide better information to practitioners as to how their days will be used.

The Darling Street Health Centre is one of many professional organisations using SMS to solve communications needs. According to MessageNet, the technology has also been used by the NSW Department of Health in trial programs for communications with hospitals, and as a reminder service in its quit-smoking programs.

Queensland Health has also used SMS but declines to explain in what capacity.

MessageNet managing director Rohan Lean says his company works with software developers to give them technology that can be easily integrated into their products. He says the company has received expressions of interest from more than 40 software suppliers to the medical industry.

Among those is the South Australian company SmartSoft, which added the MessageNet SMS gateway into its patient management system two years ago. Today, says SmartSoft managing director Tony Taddeo, about a quarter of his company's more than 1000 customers are using the service.