

# Overcoming Obstacles to Follow-Up

One of the most important aspects of working with any patient and family is follow-up. Underserved families often have challenges that impede timely follow-up. However, as care providers for underserved families, there are several tips to ensure follow-up. None of these will eliminate loss to follow-up completely, but can decrease this event and thus, the negative health consequences associated with it.

### **Seize the Moment**

When you recognize that follow-up is needed, arrange the follow-up at that moment. Walk with the client to the appointment scheduler and assist in the scheduling. Or, if in a phone conversation, transfer the client to the scheduler and stay on the line until they are connected. Or, make the appointment yourself (considering the parent's schedule) and inform the family of the appointment.

### **Address Obstacles to the Follow-Up Immediately**

For example, if a family has no transportation, arranging a cab voucher or bus route may improve follow-up. Also, you can ask the preceptor or nurse for ideas about ensuring follow-up.

### **Ensure a Method of Communication**

This often means getting more than one phone number (alternate contact numbers), double-checking phone numbers and getting addresses as well.

### **Utilize Reminders**

When feasible and indicated (you are concerned that they may not follow-up), ask the receptionist or nurse to phone the patient a day or two ahead to remind them of the appointment. Sending written reminders may also help.

### **If the Family Does Miss the Scheduled Follow-Up, Don't Give Up**

You or the nurse could phone them, phone the alternate contact numbers, or send a letter. In some cases, a message to call the clinic/office can be passed to the family through a school nurse or head start worker may be warranted. Above all, keep trying.

## **Meeting the Challenges of Caring for the Underserved**

When underserved patients are referred for care, following up on that care is also warranted. So, calling the patient to ask about the referral visit or obtaining a clinic note from the referral provider help to ensure continuity and appropriate care.