# REVOLUTIONIZE FIRST APPOINTMENT BOOKINGS WITH AN AI CHATBOT

AI chatbots are transforming patient appointment scheduling, increasing efficiency, and enhancing the patient experience.

BY ROD SOLAR AND LAURA LIVESEY

Cataract and refractive surgeons are at the cutting edge of technological advances in eye care. Their implementation can boost practice efficiency and patient satisfaction. One example is the use of AI-powered chatbots, particularly those developed by OpenAI (the creators of ChatGPT), for scheduling initial appointments (Figure). This article explores several key advantages of adopting the technology, including allowing your staff to concentrate on building an emotional connection with patients.

## CASE STUDY: AI IN ACTION

Dr. Russell's practice, renowned for its specialization in cataract and refractive surgery, recently tested the OpenAI-powered chatbot for initial appointment scheduling. In the first week of the trial, the chatbot interacted with nine potential patients and successfully scheduled six initial appointments, yielding a 67% conversion rate. This outcome exceeded that of many human operators we have monitored, underlining the efficacy of AI-powered chatbots in the appointment scheduling process.

The deployment of an AI-powered chatbot for initial appointment bookings offers several potential benefits.

▶ **No. 1: Enhanced patient experience.** An AI chatbot permits patients to schedule their appointments at any time, on any device, without being placed on hold or navigating a complex automated menu on the phone. A chatbot can respond to frequently asked questions, guide patients through the scheduling process, and provide appointment confirmations and reminders. This can increase patient convenience and reduce their stress.

▶ **No. 2: Increased efficiency, reduced cost.** Automating the appointment scheduling process with AI chatbots can lessen the administrative burden on your staff. It allows them to concentrate on tasks such as billing, insurance reimbursement, and patient record management. Furthermore, by reducing the potential for human error, AI chatbots can decrease costly scheduling conflicts and no-show appointments.

Dr. Russell's practice experienced a decrease in the no-show rate for visits scheduled by the AI chatbot compared with those scheduled by patients who used an online calendar. It could be that the former individuals thought they were interacting with human representatives during the booking process and it reinforced their commitment.

▶ **No. 3: Improved access to care.** AI chatbots can manage multiple patient interactions concurrently, thereby facilitating patients' ability to secure appointments even during peak hours. This increased accessibility can boost patient satisfaction and your practice's profitability.

## THE HUMAN TOUCH

When routine bookings are delegated to AI chatbots, staff can concentrate on establishing an emotional bond with patients and addressing their concerns. There are various ways in which staff members can enhance the appointment scheduling process.

▶ **No. 1: Active listening and empathy.** When a patient expresses concern or questions about an upcoming appointment, a staff member can alleviate anxiety by demonstrating understanding and support. Fostering a sense of trust and rapport can encourage patients to keep their appointments and adhere to prescribed treatment.

▶ **No. 2: Personalized attention.** AI chatbots are proficient at delivering efficient, accurate information, but they currently cannot provide the nuanced, personalized responses of a staff member. Staff can tailor

## BOT | LEAD

**BOT:** Congrats on completing our Laser Eye Surgery Suitability Test. The next step is to book a free appointment. Is now a good time to grab a date & time that works for you?
- NXXX MXXXX

**LEAD:** Yes

**BOT:** Great! We have two available times tomorrow and the day after. Would you like to book one of them?
Tomorrow, Wed May 3 at 3:30 PM or Thu May 4 at 12:30 PM AEST?

**LEAD:** I work 6-5pm most days in Brisbane city available after those hours at all Thursdays maybe

**BOT:** No problem, we have a few available times on Thursday after 5 PM. Shall I book one of them for you?

**LEAD:** yes please

**BOT:** Alright, we have two available times on Thursday: 5:30 PM and 7 PM AEST. Which one would you like to book?

**LEAD:** what's the address I'll see how far away from work both might be fine

**BOT:** We are located at 825 Ann Street, Fortitude Valley, QLD 4006. Would you like to book one of the Thursday times?

**LEAD:** yes book 7 please

**BOT:** Great, I have booked you in for Thursday, May 4th at 7 PM AEST. Please arrive 10 minutes before the appointment time. If you need to reschedule, please let us know at least 24 hours in advance. Is there anything else I can help you with?
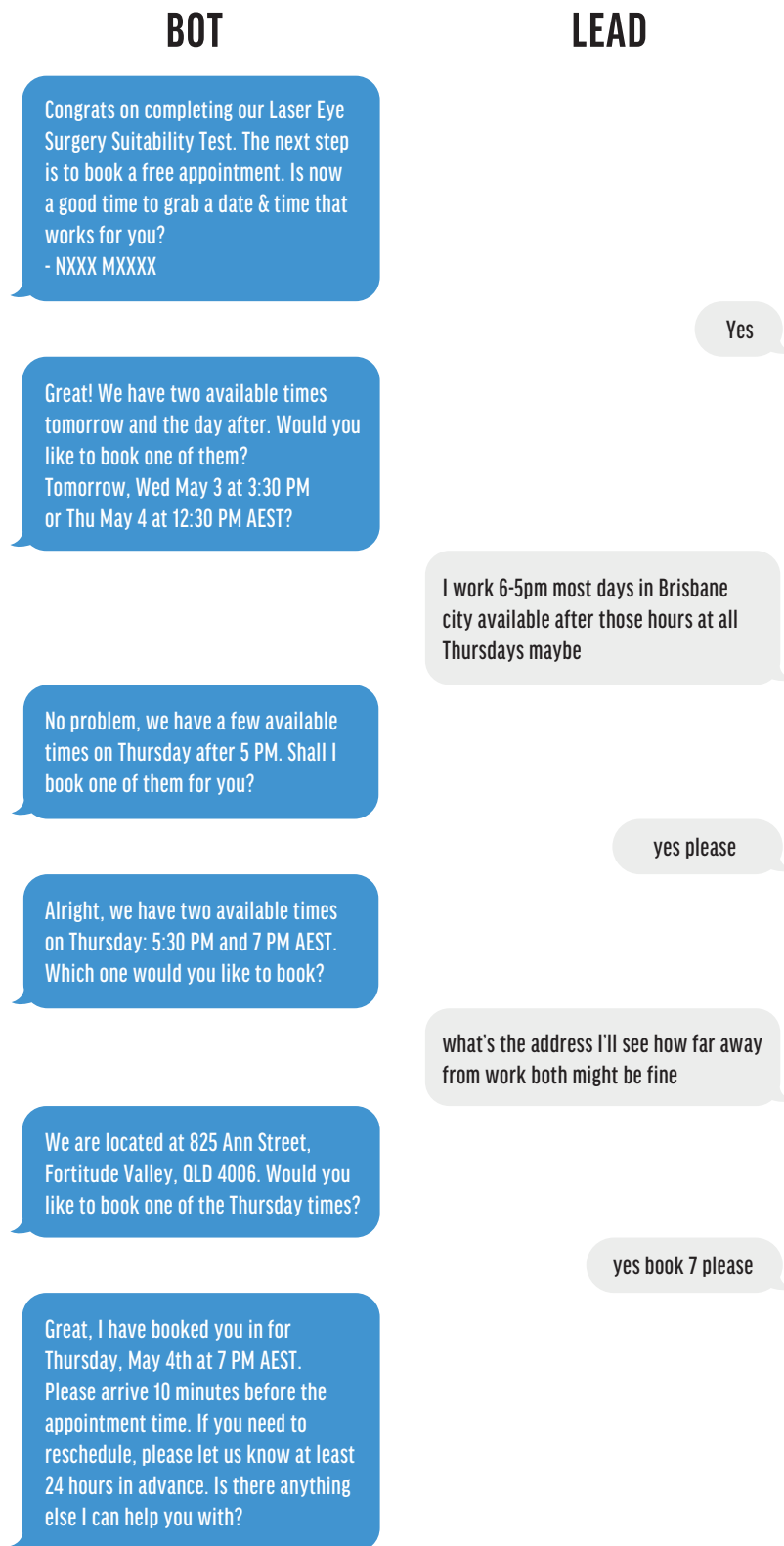
Figure. A visual representation of a text conversation between a user and a bot, demonstrating the use of AI-powered chatbots for scheduling initial appointments.

communication and advice to each patient's needs and concerns.

That said, AI language models such as ChatGPT may be able to compete with human empathy levels. A recent study suggested that ChatGPT could surpass physicians in delivering high-quality, empathetic responses to patient questions.[1]

▶ **No. 3: Effective communication.** Staff members can leverage their interpersonal skills to present complex information in a manner that patients can easily understand. This is particularly important with first-time patients, who are often overwhelmed by medical terminology and the prospect of surgery. By explaining procedures and addressing concerns in a clear and empathetic manner, staff can put patients at ease and make them feel more confident about their care.

**CONCLUSION**

By keeping pace with and embracing emerging technologies such as AI chatbots, you can ensure your clinic remains a forerunner in delivering top-tier, patient-focused care. AI chatbots offer substantial advantages for scheduling initial ophthalmology appointments. At Dr. Russell's practice, the technology improved efficiency and increased both conversion rates and patient satisfaction. ■

1. Study finds ChatGPT outperforms physicians in high-quality, empathetic answers to patient questions. *UC San Diego Today*. April 28, 2023. Accessed June 5, 2023. https://today.ucsd.edu/story/study-finds-chatgpt-outperforms-physicians-in-high-quality-empathetic-answers-to-patient-questions

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