

A day in the life of.....the Receptionists at Church Street Practice

Patients checked in	230
Phone calls received	218
Emergency Phone calls received	2

On the day of our survey two emergency phone calls were received and one patient arrived needing urgent attention from a nurse. The receptionist on the front desk checked in 145 patients in the morning and 85 in the afternoon. Other receptionists replied to 107 phone calls in the morning and 111 in the afternoon. 38 appointments were made for 'flu jabs.

The day begins at 8 am.

One receptionist mans the front desk, four more work in the office behind. The person on the front desk opens the doctors' rooms, checks there are supplies of appointment slips, change of address forms, practice booklets and urine sample bottles at the desk, updates the board in the waiting room to inform patients if a doctor or nurse has a student with them, and makes the waiting room ready. At 8.15, the doors are opened.

Five phone lines are used to answer patients' incoming calls and direct calls to other members of staff. Between 8.30 and 9.30 is the busiest time. Patients are asked details about their illness/condition so they can be seen or spoken to by the most appropriate staff member. We get all sorts of requests! For example: May I have an appointment at 4 o'clock? – Yes... Haven't you anything earlier? May I have an appointment first thing in the morning? – Yes, at 9 o'clock? – Oh no, that's too early! And we get all sorts of responses. A patient is offered an appointment but can't come then as she had to go the hairdresser; a request for a very ill child to see a doctor urgently – Oh, he can't come then, he'll be at school. Not to mention the appointment cancelled because the patient said they were too ill to see a doctor! And the wrong numbers – sorry, I thought you were the vets!

All letters (up to 120 a day) are sorted and scanned onto the computer system so the doctors can read them before surgery starts at 9 am. The out-of-hours appointments that took place since the surgery closed the previous evening are received by e-mail and checked and put onto the system for the duty doctor of the day to deal with. Blood and urine test results are sent to the doctors and the duty doctor is reminded to look at the results for absent doctors. If a doctor is unexpectedly absent, patients are contacted to reschedule their appointment. Routine check-up appointments are booked by phone or letter, e.g. for the diabetic clinic. E-mails are sent to case management. New patients' details are entered onto the computer.

The receptionist at the front desk greets patients and makes appointments. She sometimes calls patients' names when it's their turn to see the doctor or lets the counsellor know when a patient has arrived. Other tasks which are fitted in between are scanning new patients' I.D., update phone numbers, accept urine samples, take delivery of the morning post, supplies of vaccines, paper towels and other goods, sort out patients' queries about prescriptions and help with re-ordering repeat medication, and putting stamps on the afternoon post.

At 6.30 pm the phone is switched over to the out-of-hours service, the doctors' rooms are checked and any blood samples collected, computers are switched off and the doors are locked when the last patient leaves.

Despite this busy work load, time was found to sing 'Happy Birthday' to one member of staff!