

A day in the life of.....a Secretary at Church Street Practice

Tuesdays are generally busier as only one secretary is on duty.

The first thing I do is sign in at reception and collect referrals, letters to patients and any other post in our tray waiting for me to deal with. The letters regarding referrals and to patients were typed yesterday and left for the GPs to check and sign. The referral letters from the GPs are put ready to process through Choose & Book, a system where we have to look up and book appointments in different clinics at the hospitals. I also make any alterations which the GPs have made to the letters as they often want to add information once they have seen the hard copy. The letters to patients are left in the reception post-tray to be posted.

The next thing to do is to check e-mails which can be messages from reception or GPs and then to follow-up any requests from the GPs. This could be chasing clinic letters or getting results which should be back from the hospital. I normally have to telephone or e-mail the hospitals to find out this information. As well as this, I have to deal with several calls from the hospital chasing a copy of a referral letter and asking us to contact a patient to encourage them to make their appointment. I then need to telephone that patient and ask them to contact the hospital to make their appointment.

Then it is on to the typing for the day. There are 13 letters on list (some days there can be up to 35). More may be added during the morning. At the moment three are urgent, two of which must be faxed to the hospital but the doctor needs to sign these before they can be sent. These must take priority.

The diary for the nurses' clinics needed to be put on the system so that future nurse appointments can be made. The template needs to be changed to reflect the different nurses who will be working on the different days. Clinics for diabetic appointments needed to be put on as well but this was routine. The templates are done in advance about every 6 weeks and are for every clinic that the doctors, nurses, midwives run. I also do the templates for the audiology (hearing) clinic. They need to take into account absences and different working patterns. The duty doctor gets fewer appointments to give them more time to deal with any emergencies that may come in during the day.

Choose & Book referrals need to be processed but the system is not working today so I am unable to do this. This system is run from the Oxford hospitals and both secretaries have a computer which is linked to the hospitals so we can access the clinics to find out when the appointments can be made. Normally, I would take the signed referral letter from the doctor, look up the clinic on the system, and then select the appropriate clinic to allow the patient to book their appointment. Sometimes, it is not evident from the information on the letter what the exact clinic is and then I need to go back and look at other information so the patient gets seen by the correct doctor. A letter is then sent to the patient with instructions on how to book their appointment.

This has been a fairly typical day. Both secretaries work part-time having one day off a week so the days one of us are off are normally busier. With no 'Choose and Book' available today, I have had a chance to catch up and deal with outstanding queries. However, tomorrow we will need to catch up on the backlog of referrals as well as our normal work so it will be very busy!