

Training for reception and clerical staff

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Key points

- Training your staff to direct patients to alternative sources of help and advice can free up GP time.
- Your CCG or GP federation should fund training for administrators and receptionists.
- Use your website, social media and noticeboard to tell people how staff can help.
- A successful bid is one that demonstrates it is saving money for the CCG.

The General Practice Forward View outlined a £45 million investment between 2016/17 and 2020/21 to develop the skills of reception and clerical staff as part of the expectation that every practice implements at least two of the high-impact 'time to care' actions. Frontline staff acting as care navigators improve access by ensuring patients are booked with the right professional first time, therefore freeing up GPs.

This funding allocation is on a per-capita basis, managed by CCGs. The idea is that staff receive training and access to a directory of information about services in their community, as well as within local practices, in order to direct patients to the most appropriate source for help or advice.

These services may include physiotherapists, pharmacies, dentists, third sector providers, and community and mental health services. There may also be services in surrounding practices with other co-located providers from the wider care and support sector, and the pathways for patients with long-term conditions, bereavement, social isolation and financial difficulties.

1. The advantages

The benefits include reducing demand for GP consultations and ensuring more appropriate use of each team member's skills, as well as improved job satisfaction for receptionists.

Patients have access to a choice of the most appropriate services more quickly. This care may be freely accessible, with no pre-booked appointment required. It will help them familiarise themselves with a range of services in their locality, thus aiding self-care.

2. Accessing funding

NHS England says the CCG and practices may choose any training provider they deem appropriate. The funds can be used for:

- The cost of purchasing training
- Backfill costs for practices to cover staff time spent undertaking training
- Support in kind for practices for planning this change or undertaking training

Practice managers should contact their CCG to find out how to access the training fund and whether there are any deadlines that need to be met. Each CCG has a different process for allocating this funding.

Put together information about how many members of staff will benefit from the training. Provide details of their roles and experience, and the overall cost.

Develop a well thought-out practice training plan and highlight how patients gain more timely access to local services.

The most successful bids are those that save money elsewhere. For example, if patients are signposted to a local, free community service, such as an asthma liaison group, so they may learn more about the condition and therefore manage it better, then it follows that fewer appointments with a GP or attendance at A&E are required. This is a saving to CCGs in tariffs they must cover financially, and it contributes towards easing access to GP services. Give any estimate of the savings that may be achieved if patients use alternative community or primary care providers' services.

Remind the CCG that this additional education in using NHS resources will get patients into the habit of considering using these services instead of automatically heading for their GP. The change in patient behaviour may help to reduce workplace stress, aiding staff retention and making better use of NHS resources.

There is a slight postcode lottery as this depends on local demographic and available infrastructure.

It's worth scanning your locality and wider surrounding area, and highlight as many opportunities for patients as is appropriate in the context of creating best value for funding.

3. Tell patients

Do inform the PPG that you are upskilling the practice workforce so they can publicise it and explain the benefits. Make sure your patients – and potential patients – know about the new options. Use the practice website and social media, and display posters in the waiting room, supported by leaflets to take home. Remember to apply the Accessible Information Standard.

Explain that this is not about clinical triage, it is about ensuring patients see the right professional for their needs and thereby have a timely outcome. People need to understand why receptionists ask for details about their problems.

4. Alternative funding providers

In areas where there are large federations, funding for training may rest with them, so ask the practice contact.

Community Education Provider Networks under the umbrella of Health Education England may also prove a useful source of advice.

Looking to fill a vacancy at your practice? Contact the Pulse Practice Jobs team on 020 7214 0570, or email pulsepracticejobs@cogora.com

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