

A DAY AT RECEPTION

The PPG had asked the Reception Supervisor to give a brief talk at their next PPG meeting entitled "A Day at Reception". Unfortunately, Claire Broadhurst was unavailable due to a long planned previous engagement, so Ann Pickering delivered a talk in her absence. Claire is planning on coming to a PPG meeting in January, 2015 to give a talk and to take Q&A from PPG members.

There are 9 Receptionists in total who work a 6 hour shift: 07.45am–1.30pm & 1.30pm–7.00pm; the girls have a very demanding, incredibly busy and highly stressful job. I had no idea just how hard our Receptionists worked until I started helping out at the Surgery. Like most people, I thought they answered the telephones, made appointments and issued prescriptions. How wrong I was!

- **Telephone Calls** – there are 7,000 patients at the Oxshott Medical Practice. On a daily basis, the receptionists take up to 200 telephone calls each day, and Mondays and Fridays are busier. These telephone calls are primarily from patients and carers, but a great number are also from Hospitals, Consultants, Consultant's secretaries, District Nurses, Princess Alice Hospice, Nursing homes, Pharmacies (5 different ones), Path. Laboratories from numerous different hospitals, Coroners, Funeral Directors and Insurance companies.
- **Booking appointments** – on a "busy day", there are 60 appointments in the morning, and 33 appointments in the afternoon spread between Doctors & Practice Nurses. Occasionally a Doctor or Nurse might have to cancel their session at very short notice due to illness, so at the "drop of a hat", the receptionists have to telephone 27 patients to tell them that their appointment is cancelled so they try and fit them in with another Doctor or arrange another day. Some patients are rather cross about this, so the receptionists have to 'take the flack' which is rather unfair and very stressful for them.
- **Dealing with patients at the desk** – the receptionists deal with approximately 100 patients face to face each day, and more on Mondays & Fridays. This can be quite tough for the receptionists; they try to deal with each patient as an individual case as if it were their first of the day, offering support, help and empathy for each of the patients. They will encounter a number of scenarios including dealing with a patient who has just been told they have cancer; or someone who has come to report the death of a spouse or family member; or a young Mum who is delighted she has just found out she is pregnant. The list is endless, and the receptionists are expected to deal with each individual case with a smile on their face and a calm demeanour. Not easy!
- **Raising prescriptions** - on average, the receptionists issue 200 prescriptions every day; there are 'repeats' left in the box in the surgery and each of the 5 local pharmacies send their representative to the surgery daily (sometimes twice daily) to hand in their repeats too. Nursing homes also visit daily and bring their repeats (120 per month with an average of 10 items on each prescription). This is a very time consuming part of the receptionist's job as each prescription has to be carefully checked. If there is a 'new' drug on a patient's prescription, or one which hasn't been issued for a while, it cannot be issued with the consent of their Doctor, so the prescription goes into a separate basket with a note to the Doctor asking them to check if it is ok to issue. All prescriptions which go out to pharmacies and nursing homes have to be hand written in a folder in order to provide 'proof' that they have been handed over. This is also very time consuming (approx. 75 daily) which includes the 'date ready', 'prescription number', 'patient name', 'date collected' and 'collected by'.

- **Preparing Blood Forms** – when a Doctor has requested a blood test, a form needs to be issued for each patient and filed alphabetically ready for a Tuesday and Thursday morning when the Phlebotomist comes to the surgery to run the clinic. These forms (50 per week) need to be ready the night before. The Phlebotomist sees a patient every 4 minutes so if these forms are not ready, it causes pandemonium!
- **Daily correspondence** – the post arrives daily (Monday's pile is particularly large – about 9" high!). These are letters from Consultants to Doctors, repeat prescription requests, documents from insurance companies, letters from hospitals, letters from patients to Doctors, etc. All letters from Consultants and hospitals are scanned in to the patient's notes. Everything is date stamped and put into the relevant Doctor's trays for them to see. Dealing with the insurance companies is a job in itself. There are approximately 150 queries each month from insurance companies and patients 'chasing' things. As in every job, there is plenty of filing to be done!
- **Referrals** – when a patient has seen their Doctor and a referral is necessary, the Doctor will dictate a letter to the Consultant as soon as the patient has left their room (which is why there is sometimes a delay between one patient coming out and the next being called in). This is then given to the medical secretary in the back office to type. As soon as it is typed (100 letters a week on average) the letter is signed (and some are faxed to the hospital too) and then posted off. Many patients telephone chasing up referral letters, but once we have posted them, this is 'out of our hands' and down to the individual Consultants and hospitals.
- **Tidying up** – between morning and afternoon surgery, the receptionists ensure all GP's rooms have what they need and ensure the relevant information is available to GP's and Practice Nurses. They tidy the reception area to ensure it is clean and presentable.

Their job is very demanding and they are multi-tasking from the minute they walk through the door, dealing with each patient as best they can. They do their very best to offer support, help and empathy for every patient. I have only listed their main duties but there are many, many more tasks the receptionists do. They are continually carrying out requests from the Doctors and following up with patients. It is a highly stressful and demanding job, and although many patients are unwell, anxious, angry, frightened or frustrated I would urge them to give a thought for the receptionists who are doing their very best to give a good service to the patients of Oxshott.

I take my hat off to our receptionists. Well done, girls!

