



## 1 Active signposting

## Reception care navigation

### West Wakefield reception care navigation

57 receptionists in 6 practices across West Wakefield have been trained to work as care navigators for patients, as part the PMs GP Access Fund.

#### The idea

Receptionists have received training to enhance their ability to connect patients directly with the most appropriate source of help. When patients contact the practice, the receptionist identifies what their need is. They are then able to refer to information about services in the practice, other NHS providers and the wider care and support sector. Where appropriate, they direct the patient to these services. The system is also being offered through the practices websites.

One receptionist describes it as “reception plus ... it is trying to get the best for the person on the phone”. It is seen as being most relevant for patients who initially think a GP will be the most appropriate person to meet their need, where better options may exist.

Services to which patients may be signposted include:

- Practice and specialist nurse appointments in the practice
- Pharmacy First
- Physio First
- Acute ophthalmology services
- 111 in order to access an emergency dentist
- Mental health support including the local drugs and alcohol team, Big White Wall and others.
- community support services for carers and older people

The receptionists are supported by access to up-to-date web-based information about local services in the health and care system. This is further facilitated by the provision of tablet PCs and web kiosks in the practice waiting room.

#### Impact

Reports from the first few months have been positive. Since its inception, the Care Navigation service managed 6,366 referrals. Of these, just 26 were referred to a GP. In the first 10 months, an estimated 930 GP hours were saved across the 6 practices (64,000 patients). At the Church Street practice (12,000 patients), for example, 583 hours of GP time per year have been released. This represents 4.7% of GP time.

Staff cite the wide range of options as a key part of the success, with Pharmacy First and Physio First making a big impact, together with direct signposting to social prescribing options. Use of the local Physio First scheme, for example, increased by 43% after the introduction of reception care navigators.

Receptionists report that they are able to meet patients needs and free up GP appointments. Typical comments include: “Care navigation has taken a lot of the strain off GPs and given us more appointment slots” ... “I think its fantastic” ... “Now we help them. Before there were no options we just made them an appointment (with the doctor)”.

Receptionists themselves also find additional job satisfaction in this expanded role, particularly where it is newer to them and they have confidence in their awareness of the options available. A typical comment has been: “I feel a great sense of satisfaction when I have directed someone ... We are saving GP appointments. The patients benefit. Patients ring up and say thank you...its things like that. I am loving it. That little bit made a difference”.

### Implementation tips

Training for receptionists is essential, giving them both knowledge about the range of services available, confidence in understanding their suitability for different patient requests and practice in the process of matching a patient's need to a service. It is worth planning to repeat this training after a few weeks of operating the new approach, to fill in gaps, build confidence and give staff the opportunity to encourage one another. This is particularly important for practices where receptionists have not previously undertaken any similar role.

In the early days, staff confidence may be increased by the provision of a template or checklist to help them through the process of identifying what the patient is asking for and how they can best be directed.

The information about services should be comprehensive, simple to access and up-to-date. Without all three of these, receptionists and patients are likely to lack confidence to use it. If using a new website or device, give receptionists a chance to try it before they use it with patients.

It takes time for staff and patients to get used to the new way of working. Allow for this, and plan to continually share learning and celebrate progress.

### Link(s)

[www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/futurenhs/pm-ext-access/wave-one/pm-about/#pil19](http://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/futurenhs/pm-ext-access/wave-one/pm-about/#pil19)