



4 Develop the team

Medical assistants

Medical assistants processing letters, Brighton and Hove GP Access Fund

To reduce workload pressures and help practices improve access for patients, this GP Access Fund scheme developed a new standard protocol to allow clerical staff to play an active role in processing incoming clinical correspondence, rather than the GP having to deal with every letter.

The idea

Members of the practice clerical team are trained to read, code and action incoming clinical correspondence according to a standard protocol. The protocol was developed by local GPs and refined through live testing in practice, using feedback about its safety and efficiency.

A standard process has been developed for training staff in undertaking this new work. It has been found to be feasible for staff with no prior experience of general practice, as well as very experienced secretaries and clinical coders. It has been found to be important to include mentoring as well as information-giving in the training, and for a GP at the practice to meet regularly with staff in the early days.

Impact

In the first 6 practices to trial this, this has saved an average of 45 minutes of each GPs time each day, with no significant events having occurred in the first 15,000 letters to be processed.

GPs report being satisfied with the safety of the approach, the improved quality of coding and the release of their time. Clerical staff report that they are confident to run the new process and describe renewed job satisfaction. Some of the most experienced staff describe it as the best thing that has happened to their job.

Implementation tips

In the abstract, GPs often have concerns about the feasibility and clinical safety of this approach. It is useful for them to speak to a GP from another practice who has done it, as well as to reflect on the number of times currently that they feel it was not appropriate for them to have received a letter.

Standard protocols are a very useful starting point, but can be adapted by a practice to adjust to their own ways of working and preferences about workflows and thresholds for insisting a GP handles a letter.

Link(s)

www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/futurenhs/pm-ext-access/wave-one/pm-about/#pil5