



## 4 Develop the team

## Medical assistants

### Clerical staff processing letters, Wincanton Health Centre

The five GPs at this practice were feeling overwhelmed with burgeoning admin work, but found the solution was in working smarter, not harder

#### The idea

In autumn/winter 2015 Wincanton Health Centre in Somerset decided the long working hours and administrative demands for GPs had to be addressed. Practice GPs receive about 200 pieces of paperwork every day which need to be processed. With each GP holding a list size of more than 2,000 patients and demands ever increasing during the day, the paperwork was being pushed to the end of the day.

The practice handed over more administrative duties to admin staff and provided training to help them take over more of the procedural tasks previously handled by the GPs. As new processes were implemented, practice GPs found they could hand over an increasing number of duties to their clerical colleagues.

GP Dr Fox says: “We started by identifying letters that we felt we never needed to see, such as ‘did not attend’ letters and diabetic retinopathy screening notifications. We put in place systems to make sure these were dealt with appropriately by a member of the admin staff. This was a small help but didn’t make a sufficient dent in the workload so we pushed the envelope further. We trained one of the admin staff to code diagnoses, procedures and values in the letters and set the computer system so that on viewing the letters the GPs could deal with actions that were required but not have to go to the trouble of doing the coding - another improvement but still not enough.

“Finally we took the plunge and decided that a lot of the work being done by the GPs could be done equally well and possibly better by a member of the admin staff. A senior member of the admin team would then go through the post and weed out the letters that needed to be seen by the GPs but send the remainder to the admin team for task completion, coding or simply for scanning if no action was required. The initial letter reading was checked by a second senior staff member to ensure there were checks in the system. The general rule of thumb is if there is any doubt then the letter should be presented to the GP.”

#### Impact

The number of letters being sent to the GPs has dropped to about 10 to 20% of what was previously being received. GPs are now feeling more in control of their workload and regaining more of a sense of work-life balance. Working hours have been reduced – something that will be attractive whenever the practice next needs to go to GP recruitment.

#### Implementation tips

Dr Fox says: “It has been a great process for us although it may not work for all as it does require an amount of trust being placed in the senior staff on behalf of the GPs. I am aware of GPs even in my area who feel uncomfortable with that but I would strongly encourage them to consider how certain processes within their practice can be handled differently.”

#### Link(s)

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[www.wincantonhealth.co.uk](http://www.wincantonhealth.co.uk)