

Patient Update



Welcome to our summer patient update. If you are interested in getting more involved in you practice services please join our patient panel details are on your practice website. This month we focus on the role of our front line patient service staff who deal with such a wide range of requests every day!



WHAT IS LIFE LIKE AS A PATIENT SERVICES ASSISTANT?

Tessa Mounsey, our Patient Panel Chair, was keen to learn about our reception teams and how they deal with day-to-day demand. We arranged for her to meet on of our team to ask the questions patients often want to know the answers too.

I was very pleased to speak to Amy Ward, the Senior Patient Services Advisor (PSA) based at the Silsden Surgery. Amy and her team of PSAs are the real frontline “troops” for the surgery dealing with hundreds of enquiries every day.

Tell us about the Patient Services role and how it differs from a receptionist?

This job used to be commonly known as a receptionist. However, this description is quite misleading and can cause real problems for patients who are calling the surgery. The image of a receptionist is someone sitting at a front desk in a public space and with other members of the public close by and who can easily hear what the receptionist may be saying to another patient. In other words, it doesn't feel very private. The reality is quite different: Amy and her team work in a back office, entirely separate from the front reception desk at Silsden. You won't be able to see them from the reception area. Further, all the PSAs work using headphones so even their colleagues in the same room cannot hear conversations going on with other patients. The phone on the reception desk at Silsden is just used for calling taxis!

How the system used to work before we introduced online?

Amy joined the Silsden Surgery in October 2021. The world was no longer in lockdown, but strict social distancing was observed. Amy looks back at this time as a very trying time for patients and staff alike. The phones would start ringing at 8.00am with four to five PSAs handling the calls. By 8.40 am all the appointments for that day were taken! However, 15 appointments were kept for emergencies every day. Unless it was an emergency the patient would have to try again the following morning and keep trying until they were finally successful. The biggest difference between then and now is how we prioritise patient care. Previously, the PSAs were trained to escalate patient cases for urgent clinical review, appropriate care when available or to signpost to alternative NHS services where appropriate. Today, all medical requests received are reviewed by the GP Duty Team to make sure the patient receives the right care, first time.

Because of the very stressful working conditions there was quite a high turnover of these frontline staff. Abuse from patients was a factor in these departures but Amy said this occurred in only a minority of cases.

What changes have happened since the introduction of the online appointment system?

Amy agreed with many patients when she found the introduction of Klinik in April 2023 a steep learning curve. Despite the best efforts of the surgery many patients needed help in learning to use the system. Indeed, Amy and her team are still helping 4 or 5 patients each day to submit their request online. Amy stressed that she is happy to do this where patients still need that help. However, this does mean that a PSA is not able to take their share of the incoming phone calls to the surgery.

The Klinik system has enabled the surgery to refine the initial triage of patients. For example, all requests for physio go straight to two surgeries who have the facilities to deal with this type of request. The GPs will now triage the remaining requests and it is the GPs who decide on the time and type of appointment (face to face/telephone etc). In the case of a routine appointment then the GP will ask the PSA team to contact the patient to arrange the details.

The phone lines are still extremely busy. Many of these calls are about requests for prescriptions, chasing test results or simply checking appointment details. Amy does try to reassure patients that it is only in the event of an abnormal test result that they will be contacted by the surgery. If a severely abnormal result shows up the hospital will contact the surgery directly to warn them.

Does Amy enjoy her role?

For Amy her work is very satisfying as she believes her team can really help patients in many ways on a daily basis. When she first started work at the surgery her own knowledge of computers was nearly non-existent! This means she has a real understanding of the problems facing some patients in this regard. However, she is in no doubt that the arrival of Klinik has improved the ability of patients to communicate with the Practise whilst also improving the working conditions for her team. Amy also mentioned that the Practise itself makes every effort to look after its staff, which is important in keeping staff. I have the impression that Amy wants to be working at Silden surgery for some to come.

Great to note that Amy won a staff award just after this interview - voted by her colleagues across the area for the motivator award! Well done, Amy!

UPCOMING EVENTS

Airedale Women's Health Hubs: Family planning menopause advice cervical screening & more in practices 10am - 1pm:

12th September - Farfield practice
26th September - Haworth practice
3rd October - Kilmeny practice
17th October - Holycroft practice

Mixed Ability Patient Health Days: 24th September - Cougar Park and 1st October - Sutton Community Hall

Celebrate Health this Yorkshire Day

Join us for a community wellbeing check
- Blood Pressure/ BMI and more on
Church Green in Central Keighley (Just
beside Keighley Shared Church - St
Andrews) in celebration of Yorkshire day.

1st August 2024 11 AM - 1 PM

Church St, Keighley
BD21 5HT

