

The National Health Service

The National Health Service (NHS) is responsible for health care for everyone in the UK, although a small number choose to pay for private care. Treatment is free but there is a **prescription charge** for drugs and **appliances**, such as a cervical collar, with exemptions for some patients, such as children and the elderly.

Primary care is provided by **general practitioners**, or **GPs**, (sometimes known as **family doctors**) nurses, dentists, pharmacists and opticians. GPs work in **practices** of 1 to 20. Practices are based in a surgery and look after the health of from 1,000 to 15,000 people in their local community. They also provide health education in areas such as smoking and diet, **run clinics**, give vaccinations, for example for influenza, and may **perform minor surgery** such as removal of warts and moles. If a patient needs specialist care, the GP will **make a referral** – **refer** the patient to a consultant in secondary care.

Patients are normally seen on an **appointment** basis. **Home visits** are made when patients are **housebound** – unable to leave their homes – or too ill to attend surgery. **Out-of-hours (OOH)** treatment, from 6 pm to 8 am, is provided by the local Primary Care Trust, which organizes shifts of GPs and **locum** GPs to cover if someone is absent.

Note: The noun **surgery** has three meanings:

- the building where GPs work – *The practice has moved to a new surgery on the High Street.*
- a time when GPs see patients – *Morning surgery is from 8:30 to 12:30.*
- the work of surgeons – *The patient needs urgent surgery on a burst appendix.*

The practice team

A typical GP practice employs **receptionists**. They are responsible for initial patient contact, **making appointments**, taking requests for repeat prescriptions, **taking messages** from patients and other health care providers, and for **filing** and **scanning documents** into patient records. The **practice manager** has responsibility for finance and sometimes for IT, **supervises** reception **staff**, **hires locums**, and helps prepare the practice development plan. **Practice nurses** run asthma, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease clinics as well as **one-to-one** clinics for those who wish to give up smoking.

In addition to practice staff, GPs work with a number of health professionals:

- **District nurses** visit temporarily housebound patients, such as recently **discharged** hospital patients, to **change dressings**, such as ulcer dressings.
- **Health visitors** visit families to **carry out check-ups** on young children – particularly under-fives – to make sure they're healthy. Special attention is paid to **families in need**, such as those living in poverty. They also do baby immunizations.
- **Midwives** run clinics for antenatal patients.
- **Physiotherapists** provide hands-on treatment but also teach patients exercises they can do to improve their condition after an accident or operation.

PRIMARY CARE

A GP's day

Dr Stuart works in a practice in a small market town with three other family doctors. The surgery is in the centre of the town and is shared by three practices. This is a typical working morning when she is not the **duty doctor**, responsible for emergencies and urgent problems.

8.00 am	arrive at the surgery check the OOH email printout check for urgent and non-urgent messages
8.30 am	check emails from the health board and partners prepare for surgery
8.30 – 10.50 am	morning surgery (ten-minute appointments) 6 pre-booked last week 2 booked 48 hours ahead 4 bookable on the day
10.50-10.55 am	check with Reception for messages sign prescriptions and deal with repeat prescription requests
11.00-11.20 am	coffee break in the conference room with colleagues
11.20-11.30 am	check home visit requests and divide up visits with colleagues
11.30 am- 1.00pm	home visits

Complete the sentences.

- 1 Children, over-60s, and people with some chronic diseases do not have to pay _____ in the UK.
- 2 Patients with mobility problems may be unable to go out. They are _____.
- 3 The average GP _____ is ten minutes long.
- 4 A _____ is someone who takes the place of a staff member who is on leave.
- 5 Care outside working hours is known as _____ - _____ - _____ treatment.

Make word combinations using a word or phrase from each box. One word can be used twice.

change
make
perform
refer
run
supervise
take

messages
staff
appointments
home visits
dressings
a clinic
a patient
minor surgery

PRIMARY CARE

Which member of a practice team would be responsible for each of the following?

- 1 Running a clinic for pregnant women
- 2 Teaching a patient how to strengthen his broken leg
- 3 Letting the GP know that a patient can't come to her appointment
- 4 Running a clinic for people who want to lose weight
- 5 Visiting a patient who has just returned home after a hernia operation
- 6 Carrying out check-ups on children in a poor neighbourhood
- 7 Organizing cover for an absent doctor

Complete the diary for Dr Stuart's afternoon.

1.00 – 2.00 pm	practice team meeting over sandwich lunch
2.00 - 4.00 pm	afternoon (1) _____ 12 ten-minute (2) _____
4.00 - 4.20 pm	coffee break
4.20 - 5.00 pm	check with (3) _____ for messages. Deal with home (4) _____ and repeat (5) _____ requests.
5.00 – 6.00 pm	paper work, e.g. (6) _____ to secondary care, admin tasks, telephone calls to patients, private medical examinations
6.00 pm	phones switched to (7) _____ service.

Express your idea.

Describe a typical day for a GP in your country or in the country where you work.