

Communicating with Patients

General practice

Good communication:

- Allows accurate clinical assessment
- Improves patient compliance
- Improves patient loyalty
- Minimises risk of complaint

Communication starts with the first telephone contact or when the patient walks into the practice.

There are a number of ways in which the practice can promote good communication.

Display Efficiency and Organisation

Personalise the practice to ensure a friendly family feel. You want the patient to see the practice as organised and efficient. Patients look at everything and may weigh the value of advice against these observations.

Be informed

Make sure that all staff are well informed about the practice and provide accurate information.

Have a pleasant telephone manner

Always determine the reason for a call before putting anyone on hold.

Make use of signs

Make sure that the practice has comprehensive signage both inside and out.

Make good use of the Patient Information Brochure

Ensure that the information sheet says all that you want it to say.

Have good displays

Have good and current displays of literature throughout the practice.

Address the issues of Language / Signing.

Make sure that language and communication impairments are not barriers to communication. Make sure that there is appropriate access to telephone interpreter services and the National Auslan Interpreter Service for the deaf.

It is appropriate to use family members as interpreters, however it is recommended that children only be used in emergency situations.

Explain any delays in seeing the doctor

Many complaints relate to waiting time. If the doctor is running late or has been called to an emergency, then explain this to anyone waiting, and provide an expected time frame for the delay.

Explain the costs of other services

Make sure that patients understand any financial implications of services they have been referred to.

Seek permission for the presence of a Third Party

Place a notice on the reception desk when medical students are in attendance. Seek consent before the Doctor calls the patient in.

Ensure that staff members are able to say 'No'

Make sure that staff members are comfortable with saying 'No' to patients in a way that enhances the practices reputation rather than leaving both staff and patients annoyed.