

Unit Two

Good employment practice from an education provider's perspective

Key messages

Reading this unit will:

- *introduce the role of the health care assistant (HCA) and some of the benefits that come from employing HCAs in general practice*
- *describe the size of the current and future HCA workforce*
- *establish the requirements of both HCAs and practices for support with education and training on employment matters.*

The benefits of employing an HCA

The benefits of employing HCAs were recognised in *Securing our Future Health: Taking a Long Term View*.¹ Properly trained, developed and integrated HCAs can help by:

- **releasing capacity** – *enabling senior nurses to deliver more complex care while the HCA takes over some of the less complex tasks*
- **meeting quality and outcome framework (QOF) targets** – *helping the practice to meet QOF targets, eg smoking cessation, blood pressure monitoring, routine testing and generally improving the recording and updating of clinical records*
- **improving access** – *enabling the practice to achieve improved access to their services for patients in relation to the new Access Directed Enhanced Service.*

The NHS currently employs around 210,462¹ HCAs. By 2020 Wanless² reports that there will be a need for an additional 144,000 HCAs in the NHS to cope with increasing demand .

The range of tasks undertaken by HCAs varies from practice to practice. A recent review of training programmes for HCAs provides some idea of the scope of the HCA's role in general practice.²

The Potential Range of HCA Duties in General Practice

- *New patient registration*
- *Blood pressure checks*
- *Urinalysis*
- *Height/weight/BMI*
- *Ordering supplies/stock control*
- *Cleaning sterilisation equipment*
- *Phlebotomy/venopuncture*
- *Ordering vaccines*
- *ECG recording*
- *Peak-flow measurement*
- *Spirometry*
- *Audiometry*
- *Smoking cessation*
- *Restocking of clinical area*
- *Health promotion*
- *Supporting practice nurse triage*
- *Minor-illness clinics*
- *Assist in minor operations*
- *Infection control*
- *Health checks*
- *Summarising patient records*
- *Act as chaperone*
- *Helicobacter testing*
- *Patient recall*
- *Helping with specific long-term conditions, eg diabetes, asthma*

Close links with education providers can help the practice and HCAs to develop their employment knowledge and skills in a number of ways.

General practices are small businesses that operate within the NHS. Knowledge around employment law, recruitment and retention skills can vary from practice to practice. Education providers can support practices by providing education and training on employment law. The following components could be included in any such programme.

Employment issues

- *Drawing up contracts of employment.*
- *Implications of Agenda for Change.*
- *Equal opportunities and valuing diversity.*
- *Nursing qualifications and post-registration education.*
- *Delegation of medical tasks – indemnity and vicarious liability.*
- *Employment law – including sickness pay and maternity leave.*
- *Health and safety at work.*
- *Interviewing skills.*
- *Creating induction programmes.*
- *Conducting appraisals.*
- *Dealing with poor performance.*
- *Workforce planning.*
- *Giving references.*

Education for HCAs

The role of the HCA in general practice is growing and expanding as employers look for different ways to support the health of their patient population. Working within general practice is increasingly recognised as an attractive career option for an HCA as it embraces so many varied aspects of patient care. The very nature of work in general practice means that education and training are essential for patient safety. Often education and training is provided by practice staff themselves. However, it is recognised that this can be difficult in a practice where time is limited. It is important for education providers to be seen as an accessible and reliable source for education and training that is responsive to the needs of practices.

Many practices and PCTs provide in-house induction training for their staff (see [Tool - Induction pack](#)). These are often task-orientated and could be complemented by adding more theoretical concepts to create a broader understanding of the role. Education providers can support PCTs and practices with their induction programmes through short courses.

The induction programme may identify that the HCA needs help with reading, writing and numeracy skills to help them become more confident in the workplace. Skills for life training could be built into the induction programme or as part of ongoing professional development programme.

Summary

- *Employing health care assistants to work as part of the practice team provides:*
 - *opportunities to cascade workload from GPs to nurses and from nurses to trained HCAs*
 - *greater capacity in general practice, bringing benefits to patients by enabling doctors and nurses to concentrate on more complex care.*
- *The NHS currently employs approximately 210,462¹ HCAs, Wanless² estimated that an increase of 40% in HCA numbers is required in the period to 2020 to meet future demand for health care in primary care.*
- *Education providers have a role to play in supporting HCAs and practices to navigate the recruitment and employment process.*

References

1. Department of Health. *NHS Plan: A plan for investment, a plan for reform*. London: Department of Health; 2000. <http://www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/05/57/83/04055783.pdf>
2. Wanless D. *Securing our Future Health: Taking a Long Term View*. London: HM Treasury; 2002. http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/Consultations_and_Legislation/wanless/consult_wanless_index.cfm