

## Unit Seven

# Integration of HCAs into the general practice workforce from a patient's perspective

### Key messages

Reading this unit will:

- explain what you can expect from your practice when being treated by different members of staff
- explain why team working and integration are important
- explain what you should do if you have any concerns.

This section is intended to provide patients and the public with some information about the role of the health care assistant (HCA). This may be a new role in the practice team providing the care and treatment you need or it may be an existing role. There may be many other things about the role you are keen to learn about in addition to the information that is provided here. If so, please ask any member of your practice team for more information or call the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) at your primary care trust (PCT) who will be able to help you further.

This section is split into two parts:

1. **accountability and delegation issues** – this is concerned with what an HCA undertakes as part of their role
2. **team working** – the HCA role as a member of a whole team.

## Accountability and delegation

The distinction between the roles and responsibilities of professionally trained nurses and HCAs is often not clear. It is all too easy as a patient (or indeed a member of staff) to frequently misunderstand the difference between professionally trained nurses and HCAs.

As a patient receiving care, it is very important that you know which member of the team is helping you understand their role. If you are not sure, do ask them. If they are not able to meet your care or treatment need, they will be able to notify someone in the team who has the skills and training necessary to help.

Everyone who you see should be wearing name badges (which will include their job titles) and probably different uniforms to help you identify who does what. If you are unclear as to who is in what role, ask someone at the practice and point out the difficulty.

## Tasks and training

Whatever the role and background of the team member, their aim is to ensure your needs are met in a timely way, to the highest possible standard and to your satisfaction. All staff receive training and education to do their job. For HCAs, this means rigorous training and ongoing assessment to undertake specific tasks. An HCA will only agree to undertake a task if they have been trained as competent to do so and are happy to carry it out. HCAs will only be asked to undertake duties by other members of the team if they are within their role and they have been assessed to do so.

## The PALS

If you are unsure of the role of the HCA in your care, ask them and they will be happy to tell you. Alternatively, you could ask at your GP practice or your PCT. Remember, the PALS team is there to help you to get the most from the services available to you locally.

## Patient feedback

If, for any reason, you are unhappy or concerned about the treatment and care you have received from any member of the team, please raise this with the individuals concerned, or in person or by letter to your practice or PCT. They would also appreciate hearing from you if you are particularly pleased with the service you have received – especially if the role of the HCA is a new one.

## Team working – the HCA role as a member of a whole team

At your practice, you are likely to be cared for by members of a team made up of people from different backgrounds and in different roles. You may be seen by one member of the team or perhaps several different people depending on your care and treatment needs. Team working is the best way to provide services for you as a patient in a GP practice because it means you are assured continuity and consistency of care, appropriate and timely referrals to other team members, and better information and quality decisions about your care. You may even see yourself as part of that team!

## Sharing of information

Team working may also mean more people are involved in your care and treatment than those based at your practice. It might be that in order for your needs to be met, information about your care may need to be shared with other healthcare professionals in other teams. It is worth thinking about the implications of sharing this information.

Many patients often assume that people will know what is wrong with them, or that the person they are seeing has had access to all the information about their health. This might not always be the case. Conversely, some people think that information about them is not shared with others in the practice team. For example, many people do not realise that the practice secretary will have access to their clinical records in order to arrange a referral for care elsewhere, or that an HCA will be able to see clinical records when recording measurements.

All team members will be very aware of the need to keep some information about you confidential to them or to the team. At the same time, continuity of care will be important to both you and the team. You can expect that providers of care know what has happened before, that different team members agree on how your care should be managed, and that a team member who knows you will care for you wherever possible in the future.

If you have any concerns about the information you have shared with any member of the team – including HCAs – please talk to a member of the practice team or the PALS team at the PCT who will be able to advise you further.

### **Different roles within the practice**

Do remember that in small practices the HCA who may be providing you with an aspect of your clinical care and treatment may also have other responsibilities at the practice. They may, for example, have some administrative duties as well as clinical ones. You may see them working on the practice reception desk or they may take your blood sample after you have seen your GP. Remember, whatever tasks they are undertaking they have been assessed thoroughly to do them. They will be used to 'wearing two hats' and be able to manage the responsibilities of each role. The kind of information they will need from you if they are working on the reception desk will be very different to what they will need to know if they are contributing to an aspect of your clinical care and treatment. They will be very aware of the confidential nature of your care and treatment, and will work to strict guidelines about what information they share with whom and in what role. If you are unsure of what they need to know from you in order for them to carry out a particular responsibility, it might be helpful to ask them so that they can be clear with you about what is needed.

Once again, if you have any questions regarding any aspect of your care please raise them in person, or in writing, with any member of the practice or PALS team who will do their best to help.

## **Summary**

- *Your practice will have different members of staff that are involved in your care.*
- *You should be aware of who each person is and what role they play.*
- *Information about your care may be shared within the practice team so that they can care for you better – this information is confidential to you and your practice.*
- *If you have any questions or concerns, you should contact the practice manager or your local PALS service by using the information provided in this unit.*