

General Practice Assistant Programme

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What is the General Practice Assistant Programme?



The General Practice Assistant Programme was originally developed in the United States to support GP surgeries with routine administrative tasks and basic clinical duties.

This role has now been further developed in England to help in relieving some of the pressures faced by GPs. Former RCGP Chair Dr Maureen Baker says the assistants are “a cross between a healthcare assistant and a doctor’s PA” which could provide a ‘short term injection of support’ for general practice”.

In 2018/19, Health Education England piloted a GPA programme in the North West which provided the evidence base for Health Education England to fund a national GPA learner programme in Jan 19 which covered the 7 regions across England.

The General Practice Assistant Programme is a Health Education England funded project, which means that GP Practices are eligible for £1,700 per candidate in recognition of the clinical time given to support learners, and any training outlay (such as phlebotomy) that the practice may decide to undertake. There is also an element of funding offered to the practice for GP mentoring and marking time. This is paid to the practice upon completion of the GPA Programme, assuring all domains have been completed and the evaluation process has been supported.

What is a General Practice Assistant Programme? Continued...



The General Practice Assistant will be awarded with a “GP Assistant Skills Certificate” following completion of all five domains. This certificate equates to 10 credits at a Level 4. [Please see here for more information about qualification levels.](#) If a GPA learner is unable to complete all five domains, then they are awarded with a certificate of attendance.

The GPA framework is an experiential course that is led by a GP in practice over six months. They will work through the competencies within the framework with the training GPA in each tutorial and then the trainee writes up their evidence of understanding for the GP to mark on an online learning portal (Sysco). The GPA training programme is based on a competency framework. The framework covers five domains (two clinical and three non-clinical):

- Care Certificate (clinical)
- Clinical (clinical)
- Communications (non-clinical)
- Administration (non-clinical)
- Managing health records (non-clinical)

General Practice Assistants (GPA) support the smooth running of General Practices. Depending on the Practice's needs, a GPA can be trained to complete the following tasks:

- Sorting all clinical post and prioritising
- Extracting all information from clinical letters that needs coding
- Dealing with all routine clinical post directly e.g. DNA letters, 2WW etc.
- Arranging appointments, referrals and follow up appointments of patients
- Preparing patients prior to going in to see the GP, taking a brief history and basic readings in readiness for the GP appointment.
- Dipping urine, taking blood pressure, ECGs & phlebotomy
- Completing basic (non-opinion) forms for the GP to approve and sign such as insurance forms, mortgage forms e.g. ESA113 etc.
- Explaining treatment procedures to patients including arranging follow up appointments
- Helping the GP liaise with outside agencies i.e. getting an on call doctor on the phone to ask advice or arrange admission while the GP can continue with their consultation(s)
- Support the GP with immunisations/wound care

What are the benefits of having a General Practice Assistant?



Surveys and evaluations are completed as part of each programme to review the benefits of the programme for Practices and monitor the programme's success. Surveys are completed prior to, during and after the General Practice Assistant Programme, including the views of both the learner and their GP mentor.

General Practices have seen the following benefits from the General Practice Assistant Programme:

- + Reduction of hours worked by GP's above their contracted hours
- + Reduction in time spent by GPs completing administrative tasks per consultation (on completion of forms, referrals, patient notes, etc.)
- + Reduction in average waiting times for patients, therefore increasing patient satisfaction
- + Reduction of the cost per capita of care
- + Improved experience of and provision of care
- + Higher rate of job satisfaction within General Practice staff
- + Improved efficiency in patient management tasks

What are the requirements for the programme?



General Practice Assistant applicants must:

- have an enhanced level DBS and be able to provide evidence of this
- able to commit to the 6 month programme (minimum of 1 day per week)
- be competent in good patient care
- take part in the evaluation process of the programme
- be competent with use of IT

General Practice Manager and Mentor must:

- support completion of application and contracts, including confirmation of enhanced DBS check for learner
- assign a dedicated, named GP mentor to offer regular tutorials (half a day per week) to ensure the learner achieves the competency framework requirements.
- take part in the evaluation process of the programme