# Medical Receptionist

## Introduction

Medical receptionists welcome patients and other types of visitor. Working behind a desk or counter, they greet people as they arrive, and let patients know when it is their turn to be seen. They might also have other duties, for example, updating computer systems, making appointments, dealing with confidential patient records and handling enquiries made by phone or email.

## Also known as

- Receptionist, Medical

## Work Activities

The medical receptionist's main role is to welcome patients, relatives, members of the public and others as they arrive at a reception area, and to provide them with information.

Their duties vary from one job to another, depending on the size and type of their place of work, for example, in a:

- GP surgery
- health centre
- dental surgery
- accident and emergency department
- hospital ward
- clinic
- walk-in centre
- private hospital or clinic.

They sometimes update a computerised records system when patients arrive. For example, they need to make sure that the records contain the correct address and contact details. This is especially important if a patient has not been seen for a long time. They might ask new patients to complete a registration form.

Patients might be able to book GP appointments for themselves on the internet, and also book referred hospital appointments online through the 'Choose and Book' system. Medical receptionists might give out passwords to patients and explain the system to them. Receptionists can access the electronic patient records system to update appointment times available by this method.

They might prepare and print out lists of patients who are due to attend each clinic. They make sure that the patient's records are available for the doctor, nurse, dentist or other healthcare professional (for example, physiotherapist or occupational therapist). Some receptionists call out the patient's name when it is their turn. Some surgeries have touch screens where patients can book themselves in, and an electronic screen in the waiting area that shows whose turn it is next.

Once a patient has been seen, receptionists book further appointments or tests, such as blood tests or X-rays. They must keep all patient information confidential. They might be responsible for updating patient records. They might record details of who attended and who didn't.

Medical and dental receptionists make and answer telephone calls to and from patients, healthcare professionals and others, such as pharmaceutical sales representatives. If they are giving out test results over the phone, they must make sure that they are speaking to the right patient, for example, by checking the person's address and date of birth.

Dental receptionists might sell products such as toothbrushes, mouthwash and inter-dental brushes to patients. GP receptionists might process repeat prescriptions for patients, and deal with local pharmacies.

If a clinic is cancelled or a doctor is ill, for example, they might need to phone all the people who were due to arrive, to let them know and to arrange alternative appointments.

Receptionists might be responsible for keeping the reception and waiting areas tidy. They might, for example, arrange general reading material, or books and toys for children, or display posters, leaflets and health literature, in a waiting area.

Apart from greeting and dealing with patients, some receptionists could have a large number of other duties and responsibilities, including:

- booking meeting rooms
- organising ambulance transport
- preparing bills
- taking payments
- word processing
- filing
- sorting and sending things like mail or samples of blood
- ordering supplies and stationery
- operating a computerised telephone switchboard.

Receptionists working in, for example, a hospital accident and emergency department deal with patients and relatives who could be badly injured, anxious, confused or in shock. Receptionists need to alert nursing staff if a patient's condition worsens while they are waiting. They must remain calm and reassuring.

Some medical and dental receptionists wear a uniform. Some might work evenings, weekends and night shifts.

Being able to read, write and speak Welsh may be an advantage when you're looking for work in Wales.

## Personal Qualities and Skills

As a medical or dental receptionist, you'll need to:

- Be interested in people's health and care.
- Have strong communication skills, including clear speech and a professional telephone manner.
- Keep information confidential.
- Have a polite, friendly, efficient and helpful attitude towards all patients.
- Be able to prioritise tasks and be well organised.
- Remain calm and reassuring, but assertive under pressure.
- Have basic keyboard and IT skills.
- Keep accurate records.
- Work as part of a team.
- Be observant and alert.
- Use your initiative.
- Have a smart appearance.
- Know how to use equipment such as photocopiers and telephone switchboards.

You might need basic number and accounting skills for calculating bills and dealing with money. The ability to speak another language can be useful.

Reception duties can sometimes be stressful, particularly in accident and emergency departments. You must be able to cope with this pressure if you perform these duties.

## Pay and Opportunities

**Pay**

The pay rates given below are approximate.

Medical receptionists in the NHS earn in the range of £14,000 - £18,000 a year, rising to around £18,500 - £22,000 a year.

Receptionists in the private sector earn broadly the same as those employed by the NHS.

**Hours of work**

Most receptionists work 37 and a half hours, Monday to Friday. Some might work a shift pattern to cover evenings and weekends. Full-time, part-time, temporary and flexible working arrangements could be available.

**Where could I work?**

Employers include the NHS (in GP practices, hospitals, health centres, walk-in centres, dental surgeries and clinics), the private health sector (including hospitals, dental surgeries and clinics), pathology laboratories and medical schools.

Temporary work, on a casual basis or through short-term contracts, might be available from employment agencies recruiting administration and clerical staff.

Opportunities for medical receptionists occur in towns, cities and some villages throughout the UK.

**What's happening in this work area?**

The NHS relies on public funding. This is expected to be severely cut over the next few years, and this could affect recruitment levels. However, the Government has promised to protect NHS services that involve working directly with patients.

Competition is expected to be high, as people who have lost their jobs in other areas consider moving into the NHS.

**Where are vacancies advertised?**

Vacancies are advertised in local newspapers, at Jobcentre Plus, on the NHS jobs website, on Universal Jobmatch, and on job boards.

## Entry Routes and Training

**Entry routes**

You can enter this career by applying directly for trainee vacancies.

An Intermediate Level Apprenticeship and Advanced Level Apprenticeship is a great place to start.

**Training**

Most employers provide on-the-job training for new entrants.

The training is likely to include:

- an introduction to the hospital/clinic/surgery
- filing systems
- medical terms
- the relevant computer systems
- the Data Protection Act
- confidentiality and security.

Some trainees might work towards the Association of Medical Secretaries, Practice Managers, Administrators and Receptionists (AMSPAR) level 2 Certificate or Diploma in Medical Administration and the level 2 Award/level 3 Certificate in Medical Terminology. These are delivered through City & Guilds.

You might be able to work towards an:

- NVQ Award in Business and Administration at level 1 or 2.

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- NVQ Certificate in Business and Administration at level 1-3.
- NVQ Diploma in Business and Administration at level 2-3.
- NVQ Certificate in Customer Service at level 1 or 2.
- NVQ Diploma in Customer Service at level 3.

You might also be able to work towards a level 2 Certificate or level 3 Diploma in Healthcare Support Services.

There are also relevant college courses. The courses generally cover a variety of subjects including telephone techniques and switchboards, office machinery and technology, text processing, accounts and keyboard skills. Some are more specialist courses.

The British Society of Medical Secretaries and Administrators (BSMSA) offers two relevant e-learning courses: Medical Terminology for beginners, and the Certificate in Medical Terminology.

**Progression**

Medical receptionists can progress to team leader and supervisor posts, and then to management levels, after further training and experience. Some might move into health records or medical secretarial careers.

**Rehabilitation of Offenders Act**

Working as a medical receptionist is an exception to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. This means that you must supply information to an employer about any spent or unspent convictions, cautions, reprimands or warnings, if they ask you to. This is different from other careers, where you only have to reveal information on unspent convictions if you are asked to.

## Qualifications

To get onto an Intermediate or Advanced Level Apprenticeship, you'l l usually need five GCSEs at grade C or above, possibly including English and Maths.

Employers often look for evidence of relevant skills, including customer service, keyboard skills, number, clerical and general IT skills.

A work-related qualification, for example, an Edexcel (BTEC) Level 2 First qualification might be useful for entry to medical reception work.

## Adult Opportunities

**Age limits**

It is illegal for any organisation to set age limits for entry to employment, education or training, unless they can show there is a real need to have these limits.

**Entry**

Candidates with skills and abilities gained in clerical, administration or customer service roles have an advantage.

Intermediate Level Apprenticeships and Advanced Level Apprenticeships in Business and Administration, or Healthcare Support Services, might be available in your area.

**Courses**

The Association of Medical Secretaries, Practice Managers, Administrators and Receptionists (AMSPAR) offers the level 2 Certificate and Diploma in Medical Administration and the level 2 Award/level 3 Certificate in Medical Terminology. These are available full-time, part-time and by distance learning.

The British Society of Medical Secretaries and Administrators (BSMSA) offers two relevant e-learning courses: Medical Terminology for beginners, and the Certificate in Medical Terminology.

Relevant courses in, for example, word processing, ICT and administration, are offered by a large number of centres by distance learning.

**Statistics**

- 28% of people in occupations such as medical receptionist work part-time.
- 5% have flexible hours.
- 5% of employees work on a temporary basis.

## Further Information

**Contacts**

- **Apprenticeships: Get In. Go Far**
  National Apprenticeship Service (NAS)
  Website: www.apprenticeships.org.uk

- **Skills Development Scotland - Modern Apprenticeships**
  Tel: 0800 9178000
  Email: info@skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk
  Website: www.myworldofwork.co.uk/modernapprenticeships

- **City & Guilds**
  Address: 1 Giltspur Street, London EC1A 9DD
  Tel: 020 7294 2468
  Website: www.cityandguilds.com

- **Health Careers**
  Website: www.nhscareers.nhs.uk

- **NHS Wales Careers**
  Publisher: National Leadership and Innovation Agency for Healthcare
  Email: abm.wedsteam@wales.nhs.uk
  Website: www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/829/page/36090

- **NHS Jobs**
  Website: www.jobs.nhs.uk

- **Step into the NHS**
  NHS careers
  Tel: 0345 6060655
  Website: www.stepintothenhs.nhs.uk

- **Skills for Health**
  Skills for the health sector
  Address: Goldsmiths House, Broad Plain, Bristol BS2 0JP
  Tel: 0117 9221155
  Email: office@skillsforhealth.org.uk
  Website: www.skillsforhealth.org.uk

- **NHS Education for Scotland (NES)**
  Scottish enquiries
  Address: Westport 102, West Port, Edinburgh EH3 9DN
  Tel: 0131 6563200
  Email: enquiries@nes.scot.nhs.uk
  Website: www.nes.scot.nhs.uk

- **Association of Medical Secretaries, Practice Managers, Administrators and Receptionists (AMSPAR)**
  Tel: 020 7387 6005
  Email: info@amspar.com
  Website: www.amspar.com

- **British Society of Medical Secretaries and Administrators (BSMSA)**
  Address: 132 Mayfield Road, Edinburgh EH9 3AH
  Tel: 0131 4660682
  Email: training@bsmsa.org.uk

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- **Careers Wales - Welsh Apprenticeships**
  Tel: 0800 028 4844
  Website: ams.careerswales.com/

## Related Careers

- Practice Manager
- Health Promotion Practitioner
- Health Service Manager
- Health Records Officer