

A

The National Health Service

The **National Health Service (NHS)** is responsible for health care for everyone in the UK, although a small number choose to pay for private care. Treatment is free but there is a **prescription charge** for drugs and **appliances**, such as a cervical collar, with exemptions for some patients, such as children and the elderly.

Primary care is provided by **general practitioners**, or **GPs**, (sometimes known as **family doctors**), nurses, dentists, pharmacists and opticians. GPs work in **practices** of 1 to 20. Practices are based in a **surgery** and look after the health of from 1,000 to 15,000 people in their local community. They also provide health education in areas such as smoking and diet, **run clinics**, give vaccinations, for example for influenza, and may **perform minor surgery** such as removal of warts and moles. If a patient needs specialist care, the GP will make a **referral** – refer the patient to a consultant in secondary care.

Patients are normally seen on an **appointment** basis. **Home visits** are made when patients are **housebound** – unable to leave their homes – or too ill to attend surgery. **Out-of-hours (OOH)** treatment, from 6 pm to 8 am, is provided by the local Primary Care Trust, which organizes shifts of GPs and locum GPs to cover if someone is absent.

Note: The noun **surgery** has three meanings:

- the building where GPs work – *The practice has moved to a new surgery on the High Street.*
- a time when GPs see patients – *Morning surgery is from 8.30 to 12.30.*
- the work of surgeons – *The patient needs urgent surgery on a burst appendix.*

B

The practice team

A typical GP practice employs **receptionists**. They are responsible for initial patient contact, **making appointments**, taking requests for repeat prescriptions, **taking messages** from patients and other health care providers, and for **filing** and **scanning documents** into patient records. The **practice manager** has responsibility for finance and sometimes for IT, **supervises reception staff**, **hires locums**, and helps prepare the practice development plan. **Practice nurses** run asthma, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease clinics as well as **one-to-one** clinics for those who wish to give up smoking.

In addition to practice staff, GPs work with a number of health professionals (see Unit 8):

- **District nurses** visit temporarily housebound patients, such as recently **discharged** hospital patients, to **change dressings**, such as ulcer dressings.
- **Health visitors** visit families to **carry out check-ups** on young children – particularly under-fives – to make sure they're healthy. Special attention is paid to **families in need**, such as those living in poverty. They also do baby immunizations.
- **Midwives** run clinics for antenatal patients.
- **Physiotherapists** provide hands-on treatment but also teach patients exercises they can do to improve their condition after an accident or operation.