

Practice Access Communication Policies

Statement of Intent: To provide patient access during and after regular business hours, and to effectively communicate with patients.

1) Scheduling Each Patient with a Personal Clinician for Continuity of Care

One of the core principles of Family Medicine is the continuity of care for each and every patient. It is the focus of all physicians of _____ to treat every patient based on his or her specific needs, as well as to coordinate all aspects of each patient's care.

The staff understands the special bond that develops between a patient and his or her primary care physician and, as such, makes every effort to schedule patients with their personal clinician. Physicians' daily schedules are structured to allow for pre-booked appointments as well as a good number of same day appointments. Receptionists are thus able to offer patients the opportunity to see their personal physician, whether the nature of their visit is for routine or acute care. In the event that a particular physician is not available, many of our patients are very familiar with other physicians in the practice due to the fact that most of our staff have been established physicians _____ for years. Therefore, physicians are frequently well acquainted with the patients of their colleagues and patients feel comfortable being scheduled for an acute matter with another physician or clinician in the practice. If a patient is not being seen by his/her PCP, the medical assistant documents in the Chief Complaint section of the progress notes the reason why another physician is seeing the patient.

2) Coordinating Visits with Multiple Clinicians and/or Diagnostic Tests During One Trip

As primary care physicians, the doctors of _____ oversee the care of each and every one of their patients. The current economic climate of the medical field does not make it possible to have specialists available at the same site as the primary care physicians. However, all of our physicians refer patients to specialists when needed and rely on consult letters or personal calls from the specialists to keep them apprised of an individual's medical issues. Throughout the years, _____ physicians have developed an extensive network of specialists to whom they refer, including certified diabetes educators, psychologists, etc.

There are a limited number of diagnostic tests that may be performed in a primary care setting. However, based on the nature of their office, MHPC physicians do perform throat cultures, pregnancy tests, EKG's, urinalysis, PAP smears, coumadin testing, and Cholesterol testing. All routine vaccinations are also administered in-

office. Patients are referred to specialists or other facilities when diagnostic tests outside the realm of the primary care office are warranted.

3) Determining Through Triage How Soon a Patient Needs to be Seen

Because the schedules of all _____ physicians contain a good number of same day appointments, most patients who call seeking an appointment are able to be scheduled by the front desk staff. However, _____ offices also have in place a particular method of triage that is unique to that office, depending upon the number of physicians in a given office.

Our medical assistants take phone calls from patients requesting an appointment. She determines how quickly a patient needs to be seen and works very closely with the front desk staff in the office to make certain that the patient is seen on an as-needed basis by his or her personal physician or, when not possible, by another physician in the practice. Should there be extenuating circumstances, the M.A. also works closely with the physicians and will consult with them when communicating with a patient.

Same day appointments are scheduled based on the triage protocols established by the office. Urgent and emergent appointments are given priority. Urgent appointments are those determined by the M.A. and the goal is for the physicians to see the patient for medical evaluation within 4 hours. True emergencies are referred to the local E.R. If there is an in-office emergency, the physician will see the patient for medical evaluation emergently.

4) Maintaining the Capacity to Schedule Patients the Same Day They Call

All physicians' schedules contain a certain number of same day appointments to accommodate those patients who have acute or urgent matters that need more immediate attention. Same day appointments are interspersed among others in the physician's schedule. The same criteria apply whether the appointment request is from the patient, family member, or someone else calling on the patient's behalf. Great care is given when determining the necessary number of same day appointments in a physician's schedule on any given day.

5) Scheduling Same Day Appointments Based on Practice's Triage of Patients' Conditions

As mentioned above, every effort is made to keep an adequate number of same day appointments available for every physician. Likewise, the office has its unique procedure for dealing with triage calls and insuring that each patient is seen on a timely basis for his or her medical issue.

6) Scheduling Same Day Appointments Based on Patient's/Family's Request

The staff realize that patients often find it difficult to incorporate a visit to their physician, be it a routine physical or a more urgent matter. Therefore, they take great care to be sensitive to the time restrictions of the patients and to do their best in offering patients several options for scheduling their appointments.

Likewise, the physicians also realize the difficulty many patients face in seeking the care they need while simultaneously meeting the demands of their place of employment or their families. Responding to the needs of patients, our office offers extended hours. Both offices offer morning appointments as early as 8:00 am on Mondays and Fridays. The office also schedules patients until 7:30 pm on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays and offers Saturday morning urgent care appointments as well. Patients are therefore given the opportunity to come in for a same day appointment during the time frame that best suits their schedule for the day.

7) Providing Telephone Advice on Clinical Issues During Office Hours by Physician, or other Clinical Staff within a Specified Time

Great care is placed on providing telephone advice to patients on a timely basis. Physician schedules, for example, are structured to allow callback time at different intervals during the day. This allows the physicians to touch base with patients who have immediate concerns, as opposed to having to wait for a call back until all patients are seen.

Physicians also spend a great deal of time after seeing patients each day to return patients' calls and address their medical questions and concerns.

Clinical staff have the goal of returning non-urgent calls to patients for clinical advice and other requests within 8 hours of the call.

8) Providing Urgent Phone Response within a Specific Time, with Clinician Support Available 24 Hours a Day, 7 Days a Week

Urgent telephone calls are handled on an immediate basis. During office hours urgent calls are returned by a clinician within 60 minutes. The office has in place its system for maintaining coverage 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Our offices use a private answering service that contacts the on-call physician for after-hours emergencies. Should a physician not return a call within 30 minutes, he or she is automatically contacted again. Patients can expect a response to their urgent phone calls at all times.

9) Providing Secure E-Mail Consultations with Physician or Other Clinician on Clinical Issues, Answering within a Specified Time

Our electronic medical record system has the capability of a patient portal, offering physicians and patients secure e-mail communication that is saved in a patient's record, as well as providing patients the opportunity to access certain pieces of their medical records. It is the eventual goal of the office to utilize the patient portal and all it has to offer for all patients.

At the moment, our office has its own secure server, but has not implemented secure HIPAA compliant e-mail.

10) Providing an Interactive Practice Web Site

Our office does have a Website, which can be accessed by going to www..com. The Website details of our office procedures, and provides photos and short biographies of each of its affiliated physicians. Contact information is available for each of the office, as well as forms for new patients to complete prior to an initial visit. (At this time the Web site is not interactive.)

Because the site is not interactive, computerized reports are not available. However, screen shots are available and may be reviewed to document the Website.

11) Making Language Services Available for Patients with Limited English Proficiency

The great majority of patients serviced by our office speak English, and thus the need for language services is not applicable in almost all cases. In addition, there are several physicians and staff members who do speak Spanish fluently. Patients who may have trouble communicating in English most often bring a family member to help them communicate with their physician. We have also identified telephone-based translation services available should the need arise. (Make sure you have examples of these)

The language/communication preference of established patients is noted in the patient record. The office manager and clinical staff ensure that the appropriate communication services are provided for each patient and that this is documented in the patient record.

12) Identify Health Insurance Resources for Patients/Families without Insurance

The majority of patients seen by our physicians do have health insurance. Those who do not and are unable to afford medical care are directed to contact the resources made available to them listed on our website or at the front desk. If the patient is present, documentation of the referral is made in the patient chart at that time.

Pediatric patients without healthcare who are in need of immunizations are directed to their local Health Department.

Records are maintained in the charts of patients with no insurance documenting the resources for medical care of which they were made aware.

13) Patient Feedback

Patients are encouraged to provide feedback in any way they feel comfortable. They are encouraged to discuss issues with staff members, communicate via our website, write a letter, or fill out a feedback form in the office. A Patient Feedback Form is available at the office and will be available on the website soon. It may be completed and submitted by fax or mail. All feedback is monitored by the office manager and distributed to the clinicians and staff for appropriate action at our regular office meetings.

The effective date of this Policy Manual is (Date).

Staff members are notified of revisions to this Manual by the office manager. This information is communicated to patients by referral to Website. A notice informing patients that this information is available is also posted in the waiting room of each office.