

5.9. Medical emergencies and urgent queries

5.9.1. Policy

This practice classifies patients seeking medical consultations according to priority of need. Our triage system ensures that clinical care is provided to patients with urgent medical problems as a priority.

Patients telephoning the practice have the urgency of their needs determined promptly. All members of our practice team know and use the triage process, a copy of which is accessible at reception.

Administrative staff and members of the medical and clinical team have the skills and knowledge to assess the urgency of the need for care and can describe our procedures for dealing with urgent medical matters, including when the practice is fully booked.

Our induction process includes an orientation to our triage system and all team members are given training to its effective use and are encouraged to regularly update their first aid skills, including undertaking training in cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

Our practice has a pandemic plan which outlines our response to and management of patients with possible communicable diseases such as influenza.

When telephoning the practice, our practice team ask the caller if their call relates to an emergency before placing them on hold. Our recorded telephone answering machine messages, both during and outside of normal opening hours, include a recommendation to call '000' if the matter is an emergency.

Our general practitioners and other members of the practice team provide appropriate care and privacy for patients and others in distress.

We have provisions for general practitioners to be contacted after-hours for life threatening or urgent matters or results.

5.9.2. Procedure

All members of our practice team, including general practitioners and other healthcare professionals (i.e. nurses and allied health) receive regular training and updates in cardiopulmonary resuscitation at least every three (3) years.

All team members receive information at induction and on an ongoing basis about our triage guidelines and protocols for medical emergencies and possible communicable diseases, e.g. pandemic influenza.

Documentation of all triage and medical urgency and emergency training is retained in each practice team member's employment or contract file.

In accordance with triage guidelines, our front desk team members aim to obtain adequate information from the patient to assess the nature and urgency of their problem. This occurs when making an appointment (for telephone calls or walk-ins), before placing a caller on hold, and while observing patients in the waiting room.

Patients are informed that they will be asked about the nature of urgent problems to assist with prioritising the scheduling of their appointment. Should the matter be urgent, patients are advised of any potential for out-of-pocket costs where the use of specific practice materials/equipment is required or a longer consultation is necessary.

A computer entry is used to record all significant telephone conversations or actions including medical emergencies and urgent queries incorporating:

- Name and contact telephone number of the patient/caller
- Date and time of the call
- Urgent or non-urgent nature of the call
- Important facts concerning the patient's condition
- Advice or information received from the general practitioner (or clinical team member), and
- Details of any follow up appointments.