**Day in the Life of a practice nurse**

Practice nurses are based in GP surgeries and provide nursing and health care support to members of the local community registered at their practice.

A practice nurse’s daily workload varies to meet a large area of clinical needs. The nurses hold clinics which provide different services, such as vaccinations, new patient assessments and monitoring patients with long term conditions.

Jan Hanford is the practice nurse at Ashfield Surgery, Bridgend:

“I originally came to the practice as a two week holiday cover and have never left! 23 years later I am still enjoying the job. It is very rewarding and challenging and I love having the ability to build a relationship with the whole family. Patients feel more comfortable with the continuity of seeing someone familiar.”

*Picture: Jan takes surgery receptionist Sam Bryant’s blood pressure*

The main service Jan provides is chronic health management clinics. Patients with conditions such as diabetes, asthma, stroke and coronary heart disease are asked to clinic annually. Focussing on education, diet, smoking history, medication review and health promotion, these clinics are a very large part of the Jan’s workload.

Jan holds a regular cytology clinic for women between 25 and 64 to have smear tests, and she also provides contraception services and family planning advice.

A large part of Jan’s daily appointments are given to patients taking warfarin to thin their blood. These patients have their blood tested regularly to check they are on the right dose. This could be weekly, fortnightly, monthly or even longer depending on how consistent their test results are.
General blood tests are also taken on daily basis. Normally the task is carried out by a phlebotomist but a practice nurse can be called upon as part of holiday cover or illness and therefore has to have the skills for the job.

Jan said:

“I also have a treatment clinic and patients come and see me for a number of different reasons. They may need dressings changed, ears syringed or regular injections to treat ongoing health conditions.

“Occasionally when a new patient joins the practice, they are asked to have an appointment with me if the healthcare assistant is unavailable. I take their height, weight and blood pressure as well as go through any conditions they have or medications they are on. By checking their overall health I can see if there are any areas where we can provide support or if any changes need to be made. For example, they may be taking medication on a long term basis but may no longer need it.”

For travellers, Jan holds a travel clinic. Advice is given on all areas of health. This includes vaccinations, safe sex, food and drink hygiene and general safety advice.

Ashfield Surgery is also a yellow fever centre for patients travelling to South America and Asia, and Jan is qualified to administer the vaccine. As not all GP practices have applied to be able to do this, she may see patients from other surgeries.

Between September and December each year, Jan holds flu jab clinics for over 65s and patients with chronic conditions. A pneumonia vaccine is also offered and the new shingles vaccine is now available for patients who are 70 and 79. This work is sometimes undertaken outside of the working week and Saturday clinics may be set up as there are around 1,500 practice patients to be seen.

Jan also sees babies for their vaccines. The practice holds regular baby clinics so the doctor and health visitor can check a baby’s progress. Once they have assessed the child, Jan gives them their injections in line with the children’s vaccination schedule.

As well as seeing patients who come into the practice, Jan assesses patients telephoning for medical advice:
“We can only see so many patients each day and there are times when they call for an appointment and we don’t have any left. If they tell the receptionist they urgently need to see the doctor and can’t wait until the following day, I talk to them. I ask them questions about how they are feeling, their symptoms, where they are, to gauge if they do need to see someone urgently. As I know the patients well, I also know their background which can put into context what they are saying. If it is an emergency, we tell them to come in but if it isn’t, we ask them to call back the following day for an appointment. This part of the job comes with experience, and listening and assessing the patient and their urgency to see the GP.”

Jan’s role isn’t all clinical; there is also administration work which helps the practice run smoothly. Once a month, surgery staff, including GPs and practice nurses, come together for a primary healthcare meeting with district nurses, health visitors, midwives and Macmillan nurses.

It is their opportunity to raise any concerns about patients which they feel other members of the team may be able to help with. They can also share news and updates which will impact on the services they provide, for example any new medicines or vaccines available.

Jan added:

“The job has really changed over the last 23 years. When I first started I used to take blood a few times a day, handwrite prescriptions and answer the telephone. Practice nurses are trained to a high standard and have skills and knowledge to ensure all the needs of the local community are met.”