

Quality of care

GPs throughout Northern Ireland continue to demonstrate exceptionally high standards of patient care in the national system that measures the quality of services they provide. Figures for the Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF) published in 2009 show general practice teams in Northern Ireland achieved 97.3% of the maximum score available.

Value for money

General practice in Northern Ireland delivers a high quality of service with fewer GPs per head of population than most of our European neighbours. The Northern Ireland Government also receives a higher return on investment in the primary care sector than in other parts of the UK.

General Practice in the future

GPs are working to ensure that general practice remains at the centre of our ever evolving health care system as we move forward into the future, to ensure that patients receive the optimum quality of care and value for money, with the ultimate aim of producing a better patient experience for everyone.

This is why the British Medical Association (BMA) and Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) have developed this leaflet to outline what GPs do and demonstrate the important role that GPs play in our community.

Who we are

The British Medical Association (BMA) is a trade union and professional association that represents doctors. It also advocates on behalf of patients and lobbies government to ensure that patient care is of the highest quality.

The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) is the professional membership body for family doctors in the UK and abroad. As a registered charity, it is committed to improving patient care, clinical standards and GP training.

For further information or to receive this leaflet by email or in larger print, please contact either bmanorthernireland@bma.org.uk or nicouncil@rcgp.org.uk.

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the facts and data contained within this publication, no responsibility can be accepted by the BMA or RCGP for errors or omissions or subsequent consequences.

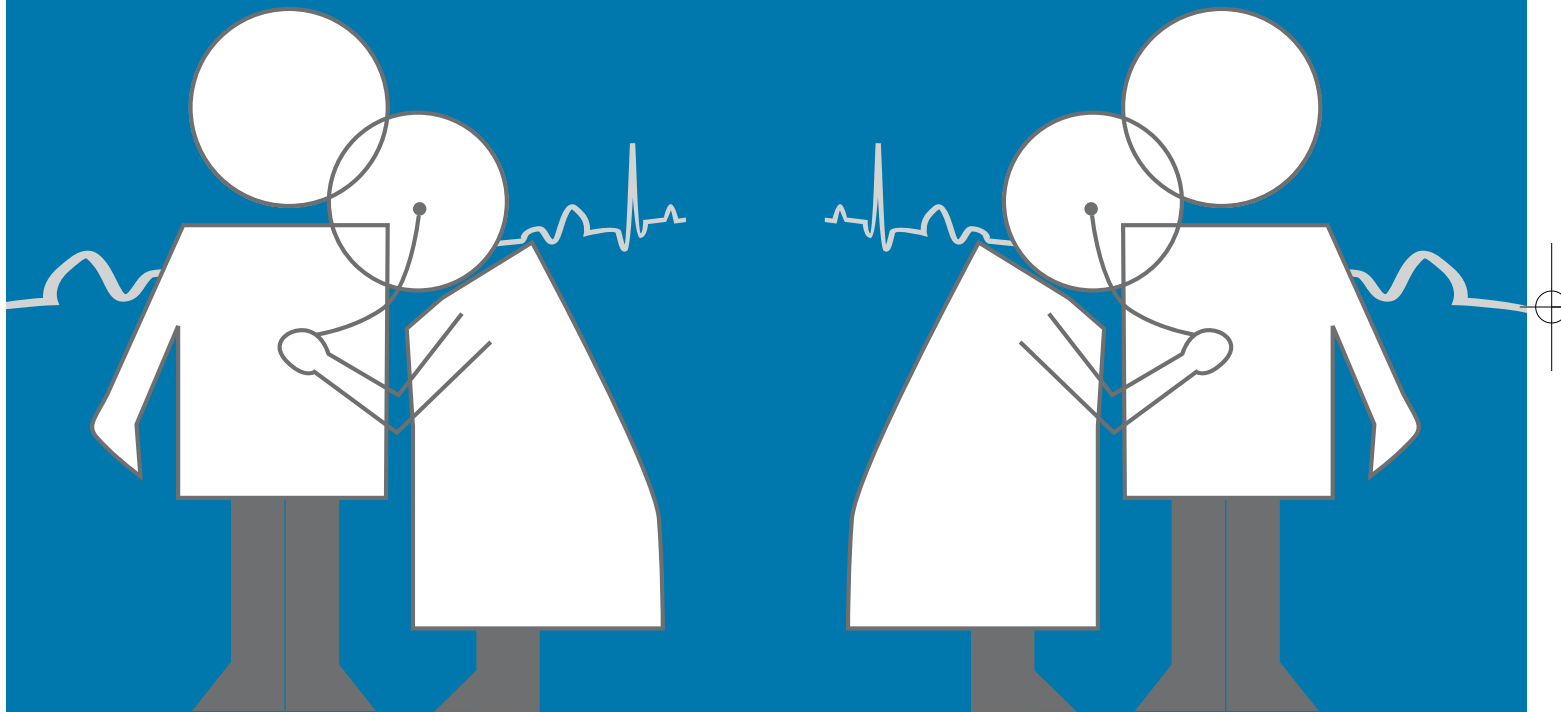
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Royal College of
General Practitioners



YOU AND YOUR GP



Did you know?

- Northern Ireland has approximately 1.8 million GP-registered patients
- The average patient will visit their GP about four times a year, with 78% of people consulting their GP at least once during each year
- GPs refer 14% of the population to hospital specialties, meaning that 86% of all health needs are managed within primary care
- There are 1,148 GPs working in 358 practices in Northern Ireland, 39% of whom are female, and over half (55%) of GPs are aged between 40 and 54
- About 15% of all practices in Northern Ireland are single-handed (one GP), with 48% of practices having two or three GPs
- Many GPs (69%) working in Northern Ireland gained their Primary Medical Qualification here

What is general practice?

General practice is the provision of primary continuing and comprehensive whole-patient medical care to individuals, families and communities.

What is a GP?

A GP is a medical doctor who provides you with health care advice and treatment. They are called "general practitioners" because they look at the health of the whole person, and this includes their mental health as well as their physical wellbeing.

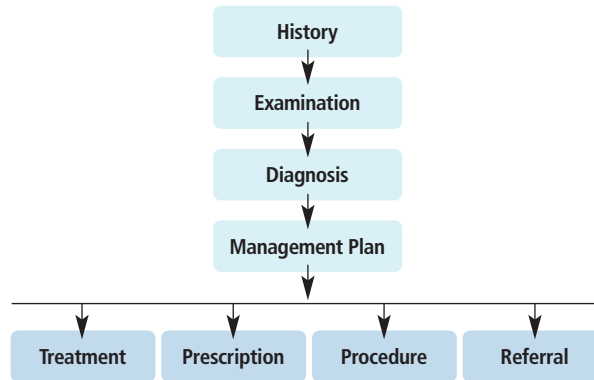
What does your GP do?

Your GP is often the first person you will contact about most of your health concerns. He or she will also try to encourage healthy habits to improve health and wellbeing. Your GP can help with:

- physical illnesses
- injuries
- emotional issues (stress, problems with relationships, school, family or work; anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts) sexual health and contraception
- diet, nutrition, exercise and relaxation
- smoking, alcohol and other drug use
- immunisations
- general health check-ups

Your GP will simultaneously manage both your new and longstanding health problems. They also manage generalised symptoms at early stages in the development of an illness.

Figure 1: A typical GP consultation



Your GP will:

- give you support and advice in relation to your health and wellbeing
- ask you questions to help determine your health problem
- arrange diagnostic tests to find out more about your health condition
- provide prescriptions, if required
- suggest types of treatment to you
- refer you to other health services
- refer you to community services
- refer you to medical specialists if a health condition requires specialist knowledge

Coordination of your care

Your care will be coordinated to ensure that you see the most appropriate healthcare professional. Your GP will do this by:

- working with other professionals in the primary care setting
- liaising with other medical specialists
- acting as advocates for the patient when needed

This coordinating role is key to providing appropriate, effective, efficient and safe health care for everyone.

Your relationship with your GP

The relationship you have with your GP is built on trust. GPs are governed by a code of conduct which is there to help and protect you. This includes confidentiality. GPs cannot divulge your medical history, even to closest family members, without your permission.

You may have been registered with the same GP for many years. This leads to

- a good relationship between you and your GP
- your GP treating you in the context of your life circumstances
- your GP understanding how you cope with your illness

How are GP services organised in Northern Ireland?

The system of health care in Northern Ireland (sometimes referred to as The National Health Service (NHS)) provides free access to general and specialist health care to the entire population.

Health care is devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly. This means that the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety makes decisions on health care for people in Northern Ireland.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) develops primary care policy, including general practice.

GPs generally manage their own premises and directly employ practice staff such as nurses and administrative staff. They often work in a large team including nurses, health visitors and midwives, as well as a range of other health professionals to offer a wide range of services.

You have the right to be registered with a local GP. Visits to the surgery are free.