

# Becoming a GP Practice Manager

What help is available?

What training is available?

What can I do to prepare myself for further training?

## 1. Becoming a Practice Manager

### 1.1 The Job

Practice Managers are responsible for running the business side of a GP surgery or health centre, usually for GP contractors who are independent. The Manager is primarily responsible for managing the practice's staff and budget, for developing its business strategy and to ensure that service delivery is smooth, efficient and is cost effective for the tax payer.

General Practice in Scotland varies dramatically in both size and demographics, from small island practices of a few hundred patients to large urban practices of twenty thousand. Therefore, the roles and responsibilities of the Practice Manager will differ from practice to practice, although all practices will need someone who takes a lead in the following:

- Recruiting, training and supervising all employed staff which could include reception and administrative staff, nursing and health care staff and salaried doctors.
- Managing the accounts and the budget, paying the wages and ensuring that the practice meets its financial targets
- Managing the services provided to the patients
- Contract management
- Managing the appointments system and staff and clinicians rotas.
- Liaising with outside organisations including the health board, social work and staff who work in the community
- Managing computerised record systems
- Providing strategic direction and business planning
- Managing complaints and risk

The list of management responsibilities within a GP practice is not exhaustive but managing constant change will be an enduring challenge for the health service and any Practice Manager.

### 1.2 The Skills

Practices will often recruit a Practice Manager who has good business acumen. They often look for individuals who can demonstrate good human resource, good financial, IT and performance

management skills. It is not uncommon for Practice Managers to have first or second degrees and many come from HR, Accountancy, Banking, Military, or Business backgrounds.

Practice Managers need to have excellent interpersonal skills and be able to lead effectively in sometimes challenging situations. They must be able to communicate with a wide range of people from different walks of life and be able to lead and manage change.

General Practice uses a variety of different IT systems so a Manager needs to have a good understanding of IT, its benefits and risks and be able to manage the implementation of new systems.

### **1.3 The Practicalities of the Role**

Most GP Surgeries are open long hours from early in the morning to late in the evening and some surgeries run Saturday appointments. A 37.5 hour working week is the norm. However, managers and their staff need to work flexibly to cover the opening hours of the Surgery. In smaller practices it is not uncommon for the Practice to employ a Part-Time Manager or a Manager who manages more than one GP Practice.

Starting salaries in very small practices can commence at £20,000 per annum but with experience and, dependant on the size of the Practice, earnings are usually between £27,000 and £60,000.

Whilst a newly appointed Practice Manager does not have to be an expert on every aspect of Practice business, especially the specialist areas such as IT they must ensure that these skills and knowledge are available within the overall team and are used as effectively as possible. Clearly the more a candidate can offer the better, but people coming into practice management from out with the NHS will need to learn some of this from scratch and the business will need to keep going meantime. One of the most important skills is to be able to get on with all kinds of people in all kinds of circumstances and have the resolve to deal with difficulties; effectively finding solutions to problems and helping teams engage to increase performance.

## **2. What Help is Available/What Training is Available?**

### **2.1 Training and Development Opportunities**

There are no specific entry requirements to the position of Practice Manager but increasingly, owing to the complicated nature of the role, Managers in GP practices bring to the job a range of professional skills. Employers will expect their Manager to be an experienced middle manager with a background in the health, social care, public or private sector.

Many Practice Managers already hold first or second degrees. On the job training can be difficult because often it is only the Practice Manager who holds such a position within the practice. Therefore, peer support and mentoring can be difficult to find.

Within Scotland, NHS Education for Scotland, deliver a course tailored specifically to the role of the Practice Manager, the **Vocational Training Scheme for Practice Managers**. Newly appointed Managers or Deputies within larger practices apply and are selected on an annual basis;

and matched, where geographically possible, with an experienced Practice Manager Educational Facilitator (Trainer) working on a sessional basis for NHS Education for Scotland.

**NHS Education for Scotland** also support Practice Managers in Scotland through the provision of networking and development opportunities delivered in each Health Board area via a Practice Manager Local Coordinator /Facilitator, employed by NES on a sessional basis to support their peers.

The **Royal College of General Practitioners** hosts a foundation specifically tailored to Practice Managers, delivering a programme of courses throughout the year designed to meet the needs of Managers, Administrators and Receptionists in General Practice (these mostly take place in England). Most GPs are members of RCGP and course information is sent to practices via their GP members. Practice Managers can also join RCGP as part of the Practice Manager Foundation. Further details can be found at:

[http://www.rcgp.org.uk/membership/practice-teams-nurses-and-managers/~/\\_media/Files/Practice-teams/Practice-Management.ashx](http://www.rcgp.org.uk/membership/practice-teams-nurses-and-managers/~/_media/Files/Practice-teams/Practice-Management.ashx)

The Association of Medical Secretaries, Practice Managers, Administrators and Receptionists (**AMSPAR**) provides educational opportunities throughout the UK. Some of their courses are delivered through local Colleges (recognised centres) but these are not available in all areas of the UK. For further details please refer to AMSPAR's website [www.amspar.com](http://www.amspar.com)

**First Practice Management** provides very helpful information on their website which is open to both members and non members. In the members section, for which there is an annual fee, there are a range of protocols and procedures, together with lots of useful information pertinent to the role of the Practice Manager as well as job descriptions. In the non members section job vacancies can be sourced and the organisation can help a GP surgery to recruit a new Manager and find mentors for new Managers. [www.firstpracticemanagement.co.uk](http://www.firstpracticemanagement.co.uk)

**Radcliff Publishing** provides a range of publications which can be utilised to provide both on line and book learning to Practice Managers and their staff. Further information can be found at: [https://www.crcpress.com/medicine?utm\\_source=radcliffe\\_landingpage&utm\\_medium=landingpage&utm\\_campaign=radcliffe\\_landingpage](https://www.crcpress.com/medicine?utm_source=radcliffe_landingpage&utm_medium=landingpage&utm_campaign=radcliffe_landingpage)

## 2.2 Developmental Opportunities Available

In Scotland, GP Practice Managers have been afforded a number of exciting opportunities over the last thirteen years thanks to the Scottish Government Health Department and NHS Education for Scotland.

There are currently 20 Practice Managers working for NES as Educational Facilitators on the VTS Practice Manager Programme and there is a Practice Manager Co-ordinator working in each health board area providing networking opportunities for their peers. NES has trained Practice Managers who undertake peer appraisal and a number of Practice Managers act as mentors to other managers across Scotland.

In the recent past several Practice Managers sat on Community Health (Social Care) Partnerships and a number represent their profession on national bodies. These opportunities are available to all Practice Managers across Scotland and it is important, as professional Managers in the NHS,

that we support our colleagues who have undertaken to represent the profession in these important roles.

### **3. What Can I Do To Prepare Myself for Further Training?**

#### **3.1 What happens now if I want to undertake the Vocational Training Course?**

The VTS programme in Scotland is lead managed and funded by NHS Education for Scotland.

Up to 15 candidates from General Practice are taken onto the course each year, with a commencement date in late September/ October. Recruitment to the scheme commences in the spring of each year. Following a rigorous recruitment and selection process, successful applicants are matched with an experienced Educational Facilitator who will meet with them over the course of a year to assess their progress and provide mentoring and tutorial opportunities. The Programme element requires commitment and enthusiasm. Between seven and twelve hours of private study is required of students each week, and many who undertake the course are already in full time employment.

During the course of the year candidates are expected to attend 2 x 2 day and 7 x one day workshops delivered by NES, plus the Practice Managers Conference the content of which provides further underpinning knowledge.

Funding is available for both trainees on the scheme and their Educational Facilitators.

Success in the scheme requires the submission of a portfolio of evidence, completion of written course work and being signed off as competent by your educational facilitator in a range of management competences.

The VTS course recognises that leadership and management in the public sector is concerned more than ever with leading and managing change and performance. For these reasons the course focuses on the competences required to manage complex change and the interpersonal skills and behaviours that must be demonstrated, in order to manage change and individual performance effectively.

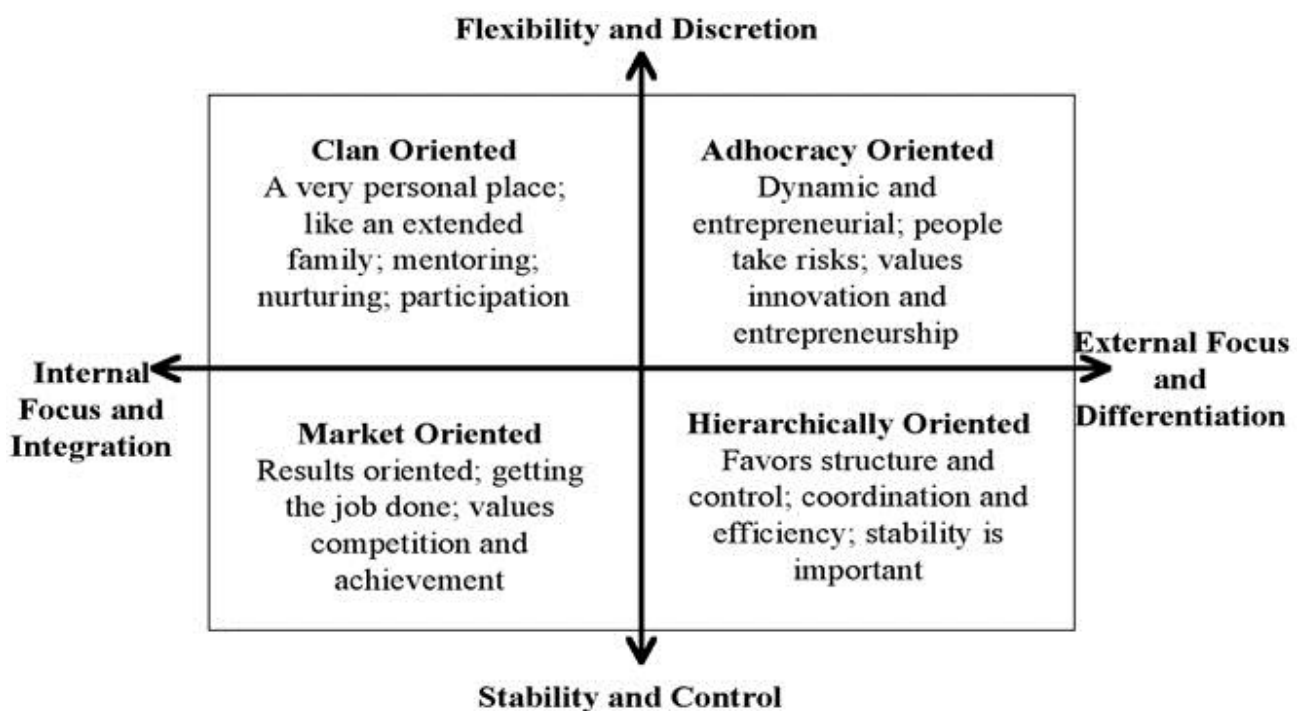
If you are thinking about applying to do the VTS, any other course, or are about to embark on a career in Practice Management the following may be of interest to you by way of preparation. When applying for the VTS you do have to provide a personal statement as part of the application which asks you to consider your current role and where you might be in five years time. The following two exercises may help you to prepare – they will get you to think about your own management style and to reflect upon your performance as a manager. Tackling either of the two exercises will help you to develop your skills.

#### **3.2 Exercise 1 – Managing Change**

Have a look at <https://www.mindtools.com> and search for Change Management, you will find a series of articles there which will help you answer the questions below.

1. Think of an example where you have had to recently manage change within the organisation. Identify the change that you managed and your role in managing that change.
2. How did individuals respond to having to change their practice? Did some accept that change was inevitable? Did some resist the change process? If this was the case why do you think people accept or resist change in different ways?
3. Describe how you managed the change, the steps that you took and the people you engaged with. Do you think that engagement with people (sometimes referred to as stakeholders) is important when managing change? Or can change be effectively managed without involving stakeholders?
4. Reflect on how the change process went. Would you have done anything differently next time?
5. When managing change, think about the kind of manager you are. Do you need to deploy different management styles at different times? How effective were you personally during the change process? Do you need to develop further as a Manager in the future and what skills do you think you might need?

### 3.3 Exercise 2 – The Organisation as a Culture



Read the following definition [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organizational\\_culture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organizational_culture)

And look at the diagram above.

1. Think about your organisation in cultural terms. How would you describe the practice or organisation in which you work? Is it hierarchical, market oriented, clan oriented or adhocracy oriented? When considering which it is, what makes you reach that conclusion?
2. As a Manager or aspiring Manager within that organisation, what is your role in developing the culture of the organisation? Are there things you would like to change or develop?
3. Is the current culture of the organisation ready to accept and implement change? If it is, describe what aspects of that culture are conducive with managing change. If the

organisation currently resists change, what aspects of its culture contribute towards this resistance?

4. If you could create the "perfect" culture for your organisation what would this be and how would you go about it?
5. Reflect on your own performance as a Manager in terms of the contribution you can make in relation to developing the organisation? Are there skills that you need to develop in the future?

Good luck in your endeavours. Remember there are lots of Practice Managers already working in Scotland who would be more than happy to discuss the role and potential opportunities with you.