

## Advice Sheet

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### 1. Background

Health Care Assistants provide a valuable service to General Practice.

The role of the Health Care Assistant (HCA) can vary within organisations, depending on the need of the service.

In General Practice it is not unusual for the role of a HCA to evolve from the role of a competent receptionist or phlebotomist.

In that situation the HCA may have received support, mentorship and training from the practice team.

The purpose of this guide is to provide you with information on the governance, accountability and responsibility of the HCA.

### 2. Who is liable for clinical errors in practice?

The HCA must work within their clinical boundaries and only undertake delegation for a task/procedure if they feel confident and competent to do, and for which they have been trained or directed by someone who is qualified and experienced in that task or procedure.

The trained nurse or doctor for the practice will hold professional accountability for any delegated tasks or procedures, as they are the registered practitioner.

The trained nurse and doctor can delegate work to the HCA once they are satisfied that the HCA is competent and confident with the task or procedure and that task or procedure is within their legal scope of practice as an HCA.

The practice must be able to produce evidence of training and supervision and give a copy of that to the HCA.

The HCA **will be** legally accountable and responsible for acting in accordance with the way they have been trained.

If an HCA is trained by the surgery nurse to carry out a procedure, and the HCA follows a different process, then HCA is accountable and responsible for acting in a way that not in accordance with the way they were trained.

#### Example

An HCA trained in phlebotomy to wear gloves when taking blood, who then chooses not to wear gloves in practice. The HCA will be responsible and accountable for any adverse events as they are not acting in a responsible way, in accordance with the way they have been trained.

### 3. Provision of General Services

An HCA in General Practice can provide general services such as health promotion, new patient registration health checks, phlebotomy and basic physical observations.

To be competent at providing a basic level of care, the HCA should be trained and assessed by a lead clinician who then deems them as competent and delegates responsibility to the HCA for that level of care.

A patient should expect the same level of care from whoever is undertaking the procedure; therefore, the HCA should have an understanding of the procedure they are providing.

HCAs need to have an understanding of all procedures they undertake, so that they can inform patients and gain consent to procedures.

#### **Example**

An HCA undertaking blood pressure monitoring must be able to explain to the patient what a blood pressure is, and the normal values.

### 4. What is an Advanced HCA?

An HCA who is advancing in their role will be at the level of NVQ3. This ensures that they have underpinning knowledge in consent, mental capacity and confidentiality.

They will be delegated advanced roles that could include procedures such as,

- Immunisation in Influenza and Pneumococcal vaccines
- Administration of B12 injections.

The HCA undertaking an advanced role should be properly trained, and have evidence of competency-based training. Therefore the HCA should attend a training course that clearly demonstrates the aims and objectives of training, the learning outcomes and how competency will be achieved. The training should be provided by an appropriate trainer.

They should also have a protocol in place, a delegation statement and a patient specific directive for administering a medicine.

The HCA should have a competency framework that is signed by the practice that deems them competent and confident to undertake this procedure.

The patient (and the practice) will then have a competent health care practitioner providing that care.

#### **Example**

An HCA who undertakes the procedure of giving a B12 injection must understand why the injection is being administered. They must be able to demonstrate knowledge of pernicious anaemia, the dose of the injection, the anatomy of the injection site, the potential side effects and the monitoring required.

## Summary of HCA Roles and Responsibilities

- HCAs can provide an essential and valuable service to General Practice
- HCAs have their work delegated to them by registered nurses or other professionals. HCAs, like any other team member, will be accountable for their actions.
- An HCA is responsible for their individual actions however the registered nurse (or other professional) who delegates the task is accountable for **the appropriateness of the delegation** of any task or duty
- A registered nurse can transfer responsibility if the HCA has the ability to do the task. The HCA will then take the responsibility because they are adequately prepared, are working within guidelines or protocols, and have the authority delegated to them by the registered nurse.
- All HCAs should be aware that, through civil law, **they are accountable to the patient for any errors they may make**, and accountable to their employer, through their contract.
- In turn, the principle of **vicarious liability** applies when an HCA undertakes activity in the course of employment. This means that the employer generally takes on legal liability for the actions of their staff at work. It is therefore also the responsibility of the employer to ensure that staff are competent, and this includes the HCA staff.
- HCAs should not undertake procedures or provide patient care if they cannot clearly explain what the procedure is for and demonstrate competencies.
- HCAs undertaking advanced procedures should provide robust evidence of training, mentorship, supervision and signed-off competencies in addition to the necessary legal frameworks to support the procedure, such as individual protocols and patient specific directives.

For further information please review the checklist below and print it off for your records:

<http://www.rcn.org.uk/data/assets/pdf/0007/387547/Delegationchecklist.pdf>