The receptionist role in CQC compliance

Glenys Bridges highlights the need for team work

The Health and Social Care (HSC) Act continues to dominate the news during 2012. The regulatory basis of health care services in the UK have been under the microscope for some time now with the Health and Social Care Act of 2008 (Regulated Activities). Regulations 2010 creating a new range of requirements for dental care providers alongside those for our colleagues in other health care sectors.

Whilst there is nothing new about dental professionals working to a range of guidelines and standards that aim to ensure high standards of quality and safety in patient care, the way that the regulations introduced in 2011 seek to involve each member of the dental team is. As such each and every member of the dental team needs to know and understand the practices’ quality standards and Statement of Purpose. They must also be trained and supported to play their role in delivering suitable quality care services to patients.

The regulatory basis for dental care is set out in the HSC Act. The standards for each constituent Country of the UK have been stipulated by an appointed local regulatory body, NHS and independent practices in England will be governed by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), in Scotland this will be the role of Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS), in Wales the CQC will work in collaboration with the Healthcare Inspectorate Wales and in Northern Ireland the standards have been set by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA).

Irrespective of where your practice is located, the new culture of healthcare is one of the whole team working to meet required care standards. Inspectors will visit practices to ensure that each member of the team, irrespective of whether or not they are a GDC registrant have the training and resources required to provide safe, high quality dental care and services.

When it comes to defining the receptionists’ role to ensure compliance with healthcare regulations, there are several essential requirements. For each of these the Provider and Registered Manager must develop policies and procedures. To name but a few, these include procedures for: blending NHS and private services, communicating about and collecting patients’ fees, data security, equality and diversity, patient safety, consent, confidentiality, child protection, risk assessment, the Mental Capacity Act, Information Governance requirements and many more. Irrespective of whether it is delivered in-house or by external trainers, training and preparation for each of these complex aspects needs to be delivered to ensure practice policy and procedures shape the services delivered to patients, rather than simply filling-up a folder on a shelf in an office.

High quality and customer care sits at the core of care quality standards. Service with a smile is a significant first step toward creating a welcoming environment. However, a smile alone is not enough to create a perception of competence. Intelligent reception services are developed with in-depth understanding of patients’ needs for information about all aspects of their treatment. Care quality standards specify the need to collect information so that patient satisfaction levels can be monitored. Then to go on to use the information gathered, to evolve systems and procedures to meet the needs identified by patients, the practice team and regulatory bodies.

Historically, the training and development needs for reception staff have been side-lined. In the current regulatory climate it would be naïve of practices to overlook the need for their reception teams to be fully involved in developing care standards. Even although they are not GDC registrants in their own right, unless receptionists are fully involved in setting and meeting the practice’s standards of quality and care, the hard work of clinical teams will fail to reach their full potential.

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