

section three

Creating a Youth Friendly Practice

This section contains practical strategies for GPs to make their practices more youth friendly by:

- ◆ creating a practice environment that promotes safety and security for young people
- ◆ improving young peoples' access to their service
- ◆ fostering 'youth-friendly' values and attitudes among practice staff
- ◆ ensuring that staff are culturally sensitive in their attitudes and practice

Young people are more likely to use a service if it has a 'youth friendly' environment that is *psychologically* as well as *physically* accessible. The most important factors identified by adolescents' in using GP services are:

- ◆ confidentiality and privacy
- ◆ staff attitudes and communication
- ◆ convenience of access
- ◆ the physical environment of the service – reception area and waiting room
- ◆ costs and billing procedures

See also Section One – 'Barriers for Young People'

Making Your Practice Youth Friendly^{1, 2, 3}

You can reduce the structural and interpersonal barriers to young people's access by systematically addressing the following aspects of your practice:

Practice Staff

Provide information and training on the developmental and health needs of adolescents so that practice staff and receptionists:

- ◆ adopt a friendly and non-judgemental approach
- ◆ understand that young people will sometimes be late for appointments – often through no fault of their own (they may be relying on public transport, or an adult to transport them)
- ◆ are sensitive to young people's concerns about privacy and confidentiality, and take steps to safeguard their confidentiality
- ◆ are sensitive to cultural issues and particular needs of young people from culturally diverse backgrounds (CALD), and avoid stereotyping
- ◆ explain to young people why they have to wait, if there is a long waiting time – as they may not understand the process of medical consultation
- ◆ understand young people's health rights and explain Medicare procedures to all young people who present alone
- ◆ where possible, assist them with obtaining Medicare card / number (*see below*)
- ◆ consult the young person on the best way to contact them for follow-up, test results, etc. – in order to protect their confidentiality
- ◆ are familiar with community and youth resources in order to refer young people to appropriate support services

Reception/Waiting Area

- ◆ Create a relaxed and welcoming environment for young people
- ◆ Have adolescent-specific posters, pamphlets and other reading material available on subjects such as substance use; mental and sexual health
 - *this provides a nonverbal message that you are happy to discuss these matters*
- ◆ Provide a range of youth-oriented magazines (e.g. 'Dolly'; surfing; music; car magazines)
- ◆ Display posters and resources aimed at specific cultural groups – e.g. CALD; gay and lesbian; indigenous young people
- ◆ Display information about the practice's confidentiality policy
- ◆ Display waiting times

Practice Administration

- ◆ Develop a clinic policy on how to deal with young people, covering issues such as confidentiality, consent, crisis calls and billing procedures
- ◆ Adopt flexible administrative and appointment booking procedures for young people
- ◆ Allow extra time for longer consultation, drop in, crisis situations or case conferencing
- ◆ Keep an individual file on adolescent patients (separate from family's file)
- ◆ Promote your practice to local schools and youth service networks, etc.
- ◆ Reduce waiting times for young people
- ◆ Accept drop-in clients
- ◆ Provide a simple **information sheet** for young people that details how to obtain a Medicare card; information about consultation times; making appointments; services that GPs can provide; etc.

Costs

- ◆ Bulk bill adolescent patients where possible
- ◆ If your practice does not bulk bill, display consult prices and explain the process of payment
- ◆ Try to reduce medication costs and use samples where possible
- ◆ Discuss the need for any payment with the young person
- ◆ GPs and reception staff can inform adolescent patients of their entitlement to apply for their own Medicare card from the age of 15

Obtaining a Medicare Card

- ◆ Young people who reside in Australia – excluding Norfolk Island – are eligible to have their own Medicare card if they:
 - hold Australian citizenship
 - have been issued with a permanent visa
 - hold New Zealand citizenship
 - have applied for a permanent visa (excludes an application for a parent visa)
 - **are over 15 years of age**
- ◆ Practice staff can provide young people over the age of 15 years with the Medicare card application form – **'Copy or Transfer from One Medicare Card to Another'** – and can assist them with filling out their application
- ◆ Young people who are new migrants, are enrolling their child, or have been granted or have applied for a permanent visa, will need to fill in a **'New Enrollment'** form

- ◆ Medicare application forms can be downloaded from the **Medicare Australia website** <http://www.medicareaustralia.gov.au/> and are also available from local Medicare offices. Forms can also be posted or e-mailed on request
- ◆ The young person is required to visit a family assistance/Medicare office with their completed application form and present original or certified copies of documents to prove that they are eligible to receive their own card
- ◆ This identification can be in the form of a primary document or a combination of secondary documents that state the name, address and date of birth of the young applicant

Examples of primary documents include:

- Birth certificate
- Passport
- Certificate of residence status issues by immigration statement
- Overseas passport with valid entry visa

Note: An alternative primary document could include a letter of introduction on letterhead from a young person's school or healthcare provider (such as a GP or dentist) stating the young person's name, address and date of birth, plus a statement that the author has known the applicant for at least six months.

Examples of secondary documents include:

- ATM card
- Recent bank statement
- Student card with photo
- Centrelink card
- Recent bills
- Driver's licence
- ◆ Young people, such as those living in rural areas, can choose to post their transfer form to Medicare but must have their identifying documentation certified (e.g. by a GP, a Pharmacist or a Justice of the Peace) and attached to their postal application.
- ◆ Young people over 15 years don't need their parent's signature to apply for their own Medicare Card, however, a new family Medicare card, minus the young person's name will automatically be sent to their parents. When a young person applies for their own Medicare card, they can be removed from the family Medicare Safety Net if they are no longer fully dependant on their parents.

Exceptional Circumstances

- ◆ Young people under 15 years who hold a Centrelink healthcare card and are **homeless or estranged from parents**, can submit a written request for their own Medicare card to the Enrollment Eligibility Office in their state. The young person is required to post a letter explaining their circumstances and enclose their Medicare application form plus certified copies of their identifying documentation.

resources

- ◆ Further information about Medicare and applying for Medicare cards can be found on the **Medicare Australia website** <http://www.medicareaustralia.gov.au/> or by calling the **Medicare information line** on **132 011**.

Providing a Youth Specific Service

Some GPs have established a youth-specific service as part of their practice. This may involve:

- ◆ Setting aside separate clinic space or waiting areas for adolescent patients
- ◆ Opening at hours more convenient for young people – e.g. late afternoon, evenings, weekends or after school
- ◆ Offering youth-only clinics – e.g. setting aside a particular time or afternoon for young people only
- ◆ Conducting outreach services to youth services, refuges, schools, etc

Is Your Practice ‘Youth Friendly’?

Use the **Youth Friendly Practice Review** to assess the ‘youth friendliness’ of your practice. The Review is a checklist that:

- ◆ identifies barriers to young people’s access and use of your service
- ◆ provides you with feedback about how responsive your practice is to young people’s needs

The findings can be used to implement changes in order to make your practice more youth friendly.

See Appendix 3 for the Youth Friendly Practice Review

Note: *The checklist is a general review of youth friendly practice only. It is not an accredited audit process – contact the RACGP or your local Division of General Practice if you wish to undertake an accredited audit.*

For further ideas and support for making your practice more youth friendly, contact your local Division of General Practice.

References:

- 1 Sanci, L. (2001). *GP Education Module in Adolescent Health*. Centre for Adolescent Health. Royal Children’s Hospital. Melbourne.
- 2 Access SERU. (1999). *Improving young people’s access to health care through general practice – A guide for general practitioners and Divisions of General Practice*. Access SERU – Department of General Practice & Public Health, University of Melbourne. Melbourne.
- 3 Rowe, L. (2000). *Clockwork: time for young people. Making general practice work for young people*. Clockwork Youth Health Service. Geelong.