

STAY CONNECTED

FEBRUARY 2021



Welcome to the February's edition of Stay Connected.

In these challenging times patients are more anxious than ever about their healthcare and this month, as we approach Valentine's Day, we want to share some love for our team of Medical PAs.

Our Medical PAs have been working tirelessly throughout the Covid crisis, reassuring patients, cancelling clinics or changing face to face clinics to video clinics and managing the additional administration involved in Covid testing for patients. Our Medical PAs know that one of the most critical ways in which they can relieve anxiety for patients is ensuring their calls are always answered and their questions and concerns handled with empathy and care.

During January our team has **answered 97% patients calls** which is an outstanding call answering rate. Our team's great efforts have not gone unnoticed and our consultants are of course delighted.

A huge thank you to each and every one of our Medical PA's.

Designated Medical Team

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CLIENT SPOTLIGHT: JEFFREY BRAITHWAITE



Jeffrey Braithwaite is a

**Gynaecologist working in private
practice at 86 Harley Street.**

Jeffrey Braithwaite provides a full range of gynaecological services, including routine health assessments, annual well women health checks such as routine smear tests and full blood panel results. He also provides contraceptive advice including fitting of the Mirena coil. Additionally, Jeffrey is well accustomed to administering colposcopies, which he performs at his Harley Street clinic.

Jeffrey often treats patients needing fertility investigations and offers techniques including transvaginal scans, anti-mullerian hormone test (AMH), follicle tracking and artificial insemination. Early-stage advice for those wishing to get pregnant is available, and if required referrals for IVF and sperm analysis. He has excellent colleagues who specialise in IVF treatments.

Jeffrey has extensive experience in obstetrics. He no longer delivers babies but offers a valued second opinion and can advise on methods of delivery. He provides early pregnancy scans and sees patients for their post-natal check-up.

His reputation is built upon patient recommendations. This is thanks to his personalised and professional approach. Jeffrey is aware of the sensitive nature of his field and he endeavours to make sure his patients feel comfortable and assured.

Other areas of interest include:

Pelvic pain conditions	Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS)
Endometriosis	Menopause support and management
Ovarian cysts	Amenorrhoea/dysmenorrhoea
Fibroids	Other female reproductive difficulties

Please feel free to contact Jeffrey to discuss his practice in more detail. He would welcome the opportunity to work with other consultants in the Designated Medical community and to support your patients when appropriate.

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HARNESS PEOPLE POWER



We are delighted to share our an extract from our new series on 'Harnessing your People Power', published in the **Independent Practitioner Today**.

Jane Braithwaite, our Managing Director, explores the broad subject of managing people and teams, covering topics such as our responsibility as employers, leadership styles, different employment models and well-being.

In this issue, she recommends the three 'C's - **clarity**, **communication** and **care** - for improving the power of your people and managing your team through this difficult period.

It is the people within them that make companies and businesses work, and this is especially true in healthcare. Despite huge advances in technology, including the automation of many administrative processes such as the incorporation of robotic surgery and the use of artificial intelligence in diagnosis, it is still fundamental in all healthcare businesses to have the right people, with the right skills and attitude in the right roles. There are very few examples of services or businesses where one person can do everything and, in most cases, it takes a team effort.

Sense of achievement

If you are a surgeon, for example, there may be moments where you feel you are alone, but caring for your patients is a communal effort and requires the commitment and dedication of a group of people with varied skillsets working together.

A well-performing team is a joy and being part of such a team is fulfilling on many levels: the sense of achievement and belonging, the feeling of being respected and of making a valued personal contribution. But for every high-performing team, there is an opposite, less successful example. Most of us have experienced at least one team in our career that is verging on dysfunctional.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, we were already aware that, in the UK, people were feeling under pressure and struggling to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Of greatest concern in this current climate is the increased pressure that people are experiencing in both their personal and professional lives. Everyone is attempting to handle the uncertainty of Covid, coping with the lack of control, worries about their health, finances and the health of their friends, families and colleagues.

Relying on adrenaline

In a crisis, we rely on adrenaline to help us perform and, in most cases, the crisis is short-lived and this short-term solution is appropriate. To continue to rely on adrenaline on a long-term basis is potentially damaging and we expect this to cause numerous longer-term issues.

In the early days and weeks of the pandemic, business owners, including those in private healthcare, focused on survival.

What do we need to do to get through this?

At the time, there was a sense that this would last for weeks rather than months.

The Government announced measures to support employers in the form of the job retention scheme alongside various loans and grants, to support us in achieving the goal of survival. Many individuals were furloughed from their positions and some continue to be furloughed at the time of writing due to a further extension of the policy. While being furloughed may sound like a pretty good deal, many have suffered from increased stress due to job insecurity and anxieties related to financial and career impacts. In the worst-case scenarios, we have seen an increasing number of people being made redundant and there is an expectation this will continue as the Government schemes eventually come to an end.

For those individuals who have worked throughout the pandemic, we are seeing signs of burn-out.



Tension between colleagues

However, one unanticipated symptom of furlough is a tension between work colleagues where those who have continued to work perceive their furloughed colleagues to have had the easy option, leading to an underlying resentment.

Many of us have been adapting to working from home either on a part-time or full-time basis and this brings about a new set of challenges. Initially, it was the logistical issues of home-working that focused our attention. Setting up secure IT systems, adapting to working in a paperless manner, talking to one another via Zoom and so on. As the weeks and months have passed, our focus has shifted to the reality of working remotely long-term, managing teams of remote workers and ensuring everyone remains motivated and productive.

Bringing staff back

Clinics and offices have faced the challenge of bringing their employees back in a Covid-safe manner and adapting the physical environment to ensure it is safe and compliant. Space limitations have reduced the number of people who can physically be in the workplace on any particular day, leaving members of staff continuing to work at home on a part- or full-time basis. Some people have been reluctant to return to the office, either because they love working from home or they are scared to come back, particularly if their commute involves public transport. The current crisis looks set to continue for some time and, as leaders and managers in healthcare, we need to take action to address these issues and support the people that make up our teams so that they continue to be high performing. With that in mind, how do we create high-performing teams in this current climate? It is a challenge!

This month, my initial recommendations for improving the power of your people and managing your team through this difficult period are **clarity**, **communication** and **care**.

To read the full article, please click on the link below.

READ MORE



TEAM SPOTLIGHT: MICHELLE WHEELER

MARKETING DIRECTOR

Why is Private Practice Marketing Important?

Marketing is an integral component of sustainable growth. Without it, there would be no influx of new patients, and even your loyal patients may slowly drop off, one-by-one.

The healthcare industry has changed. What used to be a volume-based industry centred around the consultant, has become a quality-based industry centred around the patient. Marketing shows potential patients that not only is your practice different than the competition, but it is also a much better option overall.

Marketing your private practice provides an open line of communication to your patient audience by building trust and piquing interest. It allows you to increase your patient connections and nurture those relationships to form long-term, loyal patients and therefore advocates. Successful marketing leads to successful patient engagement, and successful patient engagement leads to a booming practice.

If you have poor marketing or no marketing at all, your brand will suffer. Yes, your private practice works similarly to any other brand in any other industry. Patients drive the healthcare industry of today, so impressing the patient (customer) is an essential element that will drive your practice ahead of the others.

“

88%

of those searching for health information start with search engines

Google Complete Treatment Study

”

The Designated Medical marketing team, led by our experienced Marketing Director, Michelle Wheeler, is highly skilled in healthcare marketing and can deliver a bespoke marketing strategy for you.

Michelle has extensive marketing experience, across multiple industry sectors, and has built a robust, senior marketing team with ability across the spectrum from strategy through to implementation delivering only the best in class for our clients.

The private healthcare world is competitive.

Get in touch with Michelle now and stand out from the crowd.

Michelle Wheeler
Marketing Director

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THE IMPORTANCE OF ANSWERING PATIENT CALLS

"The patient says she couldn't get through".

"She was a new patient. We need to answer every call".

"I just received a complaint from a GP who couldn't get through to refer a patient"

How do you answer every patient call? Is it even possible?

How many calls are being answered at your practice today? 50%? 90%? Can you measure this?

How do you ensure you offer an exceptional quality of service when it comes to answering patients calls?

At Designated Medical, our goal is to help our consultants manage and grow their private practices, providing the support needed to enable them to succeed whilst also reducing the stress and pressure of managing a private practice. As part of this commitment, we regularly share our expertise and knowledge, aiming to offer helpful guidance on best practice.

In this article we share our expertise regarding the important challenge of reliably answering patient calls.

Designated Medical

Our team of Medical PAs at Designated Medical aim to answer a minimum of 90% of incoming calls every day and **they often achieve 100%**. They do this through teamwork.



The solution we have adopted is to encourage our Medical PAs to work as a team and support one another. When a patient calls their consultants number, the Designated Medical PA for this consultant will answer the call. But if that Medical PA is already on a call, at lunch or otherwise engaged, the call will be answered by another member of our team who is also familiar with the consultant's practice and able to handle the call professionally, including booking an appointment and answering most queries.

A culture of call answering

When your practice phone rings, there is a good chance that the call is a new patient looking to book their first appointment with you and missing it is a missed opportunity.

If a new patient gets through to your voicemail, they will probably call the second clinic or doctor on their list and that is why it is so important to create a "call answering culture" within your practice, aiming to answer every patient call.

Too often, we hear comments such as "the phone rings constantly stopping me getting on with my work" but answering patient calls is the highest priority and not answering calls will have a negative effect on the growth of your practice.

Measurement

“If you can’t measure it, you can’t improve it.”

Peter Drucker.

This is one of the most significant quotes in business, made by Peter Drucker, a very well-known modern business management guru. He has written 39 books on the subject and is credited with two of the most important business quotes of all of time, of which this is one.

To improve anything you need to understand how well you are performing currently so that you can improve and know that you are improving.

You need to measure how many calls you are receiving each day/ week/ month and most importantly how many of those calls are being answered. Ideally you would regularly monitor the percentage of calls being answered. A sensible percentage to aim for as a starting point is 80% of calls to be answered but 90% would be better.

To answer 100% of calls is not impossible but would require significant effort.

If you analyse calling patterns for your clinic, you will see that calls, annoyingly, do not arrive in a routine fashion. There will be busy periods on certain days of the week and at certain times of day. Most people find that Monday mornings are exceptionally busy, but Fridays are quieter. The busiest times of day tends to be 9am to 10am, followed by a flurry at lunchtime and at the end of the day. Ensuring you have enough resource to answer all the calls at these busy times, is challenging.

Answering a minimum of 90% of calls is great, but you also need to ensure that the few calls that are answered by voicemail are returned promptly and this can be achieved during those quieter periods but must be done within a truly short period of time.

Technology

Technology provides numerous solutions to help you improve call answering. A good telephone system enables you to set up a “hunt group” so that incoming calls are delivered to a group of people automatically

and this is the feature that we use at Designated Medical. This ensures that calls are answered as quickly as possible ideally by the Designated Medical PA, but when not possible, by another member of the team.

There are other pieces of technology that you may love or hate, for example, the option to press 1 for appointments, 2 for invoicing, 3 for address details which is called an automated attendant.

Own your number!

This is a slight aside, but we want to take this opportunity to advise you that it is vital for every consultant/ practice/ clinic to “own” their own telephone number. You will spend significant time and money promoting your telephone number on websites, business cards, hospital websites and insurance company websites and patients will store your number on their mobile phone. Changing your telephone number part way through your career will have negative consequences and we have seen this happen too often. With modern technology, it should be possible to “port” a telephone number from one system to another, but this is not always the case.

The same applies to consultants sharing a telephone number, perhaps because they share a medical secretary. What happens if someone leaves the partnership? Who retains the number? You can’t split in in half!

Please make sure you “own” your own number from day one. It is equally important to “own” your own email address.

Message taking services.

There are numerous call answering bureaus such as Money Penny, specialising in answering calls in a reliable manner and their % answered will be very impressive, for example “we answer 95% of calls in 4 rings or less”. These services are generally large call centres, and your calls will be answered with a pre-determined script. A message will be taken and sent to your clinic by email or text message.

There is a place for these services in the private medical world but ideally most calls should be answered by someone who can help the patient by booking an appointment or assisting with their questions as opposed to simply taking a message. These services can be utilised as an overflow service to avoid patients receiving voicemail and can also be used to extend your “opening hours” or even provide a 24-hour service.

Auditing your calls

We would also advise performing regular call audits. This is not at all high tech and involves your Medical PA keeping a record of the nature of each call received. A simple checklist on a notepad kept by the phone will suffice.

The calls you desperately do not want to miss are the calls from new patients looking to book an appointment.

On a typical day, say you receive 35 calls, and your audit results tell you that 15 of these are patients calling to confirm the practice address, you can take action to reduce the number of these calls and improving your chances of answering the calls from new patients looking to book an appointment. Simply sending patients an appointment reminder ahead of their appointment, including the practice address and how to find you will work. If you ask your patients to confirm their appointment, I strongly recommend asking them to reply by email as opposed to calling to confirm!

If your audit results tell you that 10 out of the 35 calls each day are from patients chasing their results, then you need to look at why this is happening.

Are the results being sent out in a timely manner?

Or perhaps patients are being advised that results will be received quickly, setting expectations that are too high?

Online booking

Many Practice Management Systems (PMS) now offer online booking and if your PMS does, we recommend implementing this on your website. We know that patients, especially the younger demographic, are keen to book online, and we encourage all clinics and consultants to embrace this new technology as it offers patients something they want, and it reduces call volumes. **What's not to love!**

Our Top Tips

Develop a “Call answering culture” – answering patient calls must be viewed as high/ top priority.

Measure it to improve it – regularly review call answering performance.

Call audit – why do patients call?

Reduce the number of calls where appropriate.

Technology solutions – Investigate ways your telephone system can help you to improve.

Own your telephone number – ensure you have a number (and email address) for life.

Voicemail – Ensure messages are returned promptly.

Appointment reminders – include address details. Ask patients to email to confirm rather than call.

Online booking – set up on your website.

Call answering bureaus/ call centres – use as a backup option and to increase your “opening” times.

We hope you have found this article of value. We would love to hear your feedback so please do get in touch with any comments or questions. If we can help you to improve the management of your practice in any way, we would be delighted to help.

We provide support across all aspects of private practice including marketing, website development, Medical PA, HR and finance.

We look forward to hearing from you.