

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 *Barriers for Young People - Section One, P. 14*)



I. 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 adolescents' concerns about privacy and confidentiality, and take steps to safeguard their confidentiality
- avoid stereotyping young people from culturally diverse backgrounds and are sensitive to any cultural issues or particular needs they may have
- 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 peoples' 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. NESB; 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
- Have 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

- Practice staff can provide application forms and assist the young person with filling out the application (application forms are also available from a Medicare office or chemist)
- The young person can then either:
 - a) Present their parents' Medicare number and ask for their own card and number to be issued, or
 - b) Provide two forms identification with their name and address on it; or name and photo; or name and date of birth. The young person must be able to prove that they are 15. Identification can be in the form of:
 - Birth certificate
 - Bank book (if it has an address on it)
 - School registration form
 - Student card
- The new Medicare card will then be sent out in the mail (or to a friend; or to GP's office – if they don't want it sent to their home)

Health Care cards

- If a young person is receiving benefits from Centrelink, they will automatically receive a Health Care card
- If the young person is under sixteen, and their parents have a Health Care card, the young person is able to use their parents card
- If a young person is sixteen years of age or over, and earns less than a certain amount each week, they are eligible for a Health Care card
- They can apply at any Centrelink office
- A Health Care card entitles people to benefits such as cheaper health care, cheaper medicines and travel concessions.

Providing a Youth Specific Service

Some GPs have established an adolescent-specific service within 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 peoples’ access and use of your service
- provides you with feedback about how responsive your practice is to young peoples’ needs

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

(See Appendix 1 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 to if you wish to undertake an accredited audit (e.g. the youth-friendly practice audit developed by the South Australian RACGP as part of the “Keep Yourself Alive” youth suicide prevention project)*

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. *Clockwork: time for young people. Making general practice work for young people*. Clockwork Youth Health Service. Geelong. 2000.