

# Administration

Join the team and  
make a difference

**As a member of the administrative staff, you will provide the essential back-up that makes all the difference to the working lives of doctors, scientists, nurses and other healthcare professionals. There is a wide choice of roles and places to work. You might enjoy dealing with patients and their relatives, for example as a receptionist in a clinic or a clerk on a ward. Alternatively, if you have the right skills, you might prefer working closely with a consultant as a medical secretary.**



## What will you do?

### Clerk

As a clerk you could work in any one of a huge range of settings in the NHS – wherever you feel you fit in best. You might greet patients as they arrive for their appointments, check their details on a computer and call them when the doctor or other healthcare professional is ready to see them. In this role you might be on your own at the desk or working with a couple of colleagues. You might also collect patients' medical records ready for the consultation and deal with their questions. You could help to admit and discharge patients, arrange their transport, as well as taking phone calls from doctors, nurses and patients' relatives. In other clerical roles, you might have no patient contact, doing general tasks such as filing, answering phones or ordering supplies for a ward or hospital department.

### Medical record-keeper

Working as part of a team of record-keepers, you will look after the confidential clinical notes written by healthcare professionals. These records are essential if patients are to get the right drugs and other treatments. You will issue the notes to the doctor or other healthcare professional when a patient has a clinic appointment or is admitted to hospital and then ensure those notes are returned and stored securely.

### Medical secretary/personal assistant

You may work for a manager, GP, doctor or other healthcare professional or group of professionals. You will run the office on a daily basis, dealing with correspondence, making appointments, handling patients' queries and liaising with other healthcare staff. As a secretary in a GP practice, you would handle letters and phone calls about

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a huge range of different conditions, but working for a hospital doctor you would be based in a specialist department, for example, paediatrics (child health) or cardiology (heart care). This is a responsible job, as you will be expected to use your own initiative, make decisions and deal with patients and their relatives who are worried or upset about their illness.

### Receptionist

You are the face of the NHS, that all-important initial contact for patients and relatives. They might be anxious – perhaps this is their first visit to the doctor or they're waiting for the results of an important test. Your friendly reassuring manner will help ease the situation. Working on your own or with one or two other receptionists, you'll greet patients as they arrive and check them in. You might also collect their notes and ensure that these vital records go to the right healthcare professional. In a clinic, you could be making appointments on a computer and arranging patients' transport. Hospital departments are busy places and the pace can be fast and furious, so you'll think on your feet.

### Secretary/typist

You could do a combination of different tasks, depending on how your office or department is organised. As well as using your word-processing skills, you might work with spreadsheets and databases, deal with post, emails and phone calls, and run a filing system. You probably won't have much face-to-face contact with patients but in some jobs – if you work for a GP or a team of nurses, for example – you could be dealing with patients on the phone.

### Switchboard operator/telephonist

In a hospital or GP surgery, the voice at the end of the phone is the first point of contact for patients and their families. They might be anxious or upset, waiting to hear news

about a friend or relative, or phoning to check details of an important clinic appointment. As a telephonist you will be a vital link between them and the person who can help. You will also handle urgent calls between members of the healthcare team in hospitals and the community. A GP might ring to arrange an emergency appointment for a patient or a health visitor might want to check some key information about a child. You'll provide the fast, efficient service that they need.



This is a responsible job, as you will be expected to use your own initiative, make decisions and deal with patients and their relatives who are worried or upset about their illness

Role	Where will you work?	What skills and qualities will you need?
Clerk	You might be based in a busy hospital administration office with no patient contact, or in an outpatient clinic or on a hospital ward. You might work some evenings and weekends.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• accuracy and efficiency</li> <li>• good communication skills</li> <li>• discretion – if working with confidential information</li> <li>• friendly, sympathetic manner</li> </ul>
Medical record-keeper	You will usually be based in a central records department in a busy hospital, as part of a team. You will probably work usual office hours.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• accuracy</li> <li>• speed and efficiency</li> <li>• discretion</li> </ul>
Medical secretary or personal assistant	You'll probably be based in an office in a large hospital, working normal office hours. You could also work in a busy GP surgery or specialist community clinic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• accuracy and efficiency</li> <li>• organisational ability – you will need to ensure that patient records are available when needed</li> <li>• good communication skills</li> <li>• discretion</li> <li>• friendly, sympathetic manner</li> </ul>
Receptionist	You might be on the busy front desk of a hospital outpatient clinic. You might also be in a GP surgery. You might work some evening and weekend shifts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• efficiency</li> <li>• good communication skills</li> <li>• discretion</li> <li>• friendly, sympathetic manner</li> </ul>
Secretary or typist	You could be based in an office in a busy hospital in any one of a huge range of different departments. You might work in a GP surgery or be based at a trust or health authority headquarters. You will work usual office hours.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• accuracy</li> <li>• efficiency</li> <li>• good communication skills</li> <li>• discretion</li> <li>• friendly, sympathetic manner</li> </ul>
Switchboard operator or telephonist	You will work on a busy switchboard in a hospital or at another central NHS location, such as a health authority or trust headquarters. You might work shifts, including some nights and weekends.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• efficiency</li> <li>• good communication skills</li> <li>• friendly, sympathetic manner</li> </ul>

### What entry routes are available?

If you want to be a secretary or typist in the NHS you'll require a good general education, for example five GCSEs at grade C or above, or the equivalent, plus proven secretarial skills. Medical secretaries and personal assistants, in addition to the above, may need to have – or work towards – the diploma in medical secretarial studies awarded by the Association of Medical Secretaries, Practice Managers, Administrators and Receptionists (AMSPAR). There are no minimum qualifications for clerks and medical record-keepers.

For more information on the range of opportunities available in the wider healthcare team, please visit

[www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/qualifications](http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/qualifications)

This gives more specific details about what qualifications are necessary for each role.

You can search for current vacancies and download job descriptions at

[www.jobs.nhs.uk](http://www.jobs.nhs.uk)

### How can you develop your career?

If you stay in administration, you could qualify as a medical secretary by studying for the AMSPAR diploma or by taking a qualification from the British Society of Medical Secretaries and Administrators. Also within administration, you could take management and business qualifications and move into a management role. There are opportunities at various levels in the NHS, including for graduates.

You could move into corporate services (see corporate services factsheet), human resources or finance (see the *Careers in management* booklet). You could then move up this specialist professional ladder. As you see more of the work of the health service, you might opt to train for one of the healthcare professions.

Find out more about what training is open to you, and how you can develop your career, at [www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/training](http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/training)



As well as moving to more senior and specialised roles within this area, you will also have the chance to take on additional responsibilities and progress within the organisation, as part of the Career Framework. For more information about this initiative please see the *Careers in the wider healthcare team* booklet.

### Pay

Agenda for Change (AfC) is the national pay system for the NHS. This applies to all staff in the wider healthcare team except the most senior managers. These are examples of roles and the AfC bands at which they may be paid: clerical officer – wards (Band 2); medical secretary (Bands 3-4); personal assistant (Band 5). For more information, visit [www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/payandbenefits](http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/payandbenefits)

**To find out more about careers in the wider healthcare team, please visit**  
[www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/working](http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/working)

**For contact details including professional bodies, visit**  
[www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/contacts](http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/contacts)