

Slaying the dragon myth: A study of receptionists in UK general practice

February 25 2013

General practice receptionists are not simply powerful and formidable 'gatekeepers' to GPs as they are occasionally portrayed in the mainstream media, according to research from The University Manchester.

The study, published in this month's *British Journal of General Practice*, attests that receptionists fulfil an essential role in UK primary care through shaping access to [health professionals](#). However, this is often a difficult task involving prioritising patients with minimal time, information and training. The popularisation of them in the media masks the multitude of other tasks that they have to perform and trivialises the decisions they have to make.

The ethnographic study carried out by researchers at The University of Manchester and the University of Liverpool analysed over 200 hours of interactions between 45 GP receptionists and patients as well as interviews with the receptionists. The seven surgeries studied were in urban areas of [northwest England](#).

It concluded that GP receptionists generally feel a responsibility to protect the most vulnerable patients. However, this was at times made difficult by a shortage of appointments, certain patients trying to 'play the system', and specific protocols being imposed in some GP practices.

Jonathan Hammond, lead author on the paper from The University of Manchester's Institute of [Population Health](#), said: "It might be the case

that what are portrayed as individual failings on the part of receptionists are actually due to systemic problems within GP practices.

"Any further training to address negative aspects of receptionist-patient relationships should reflect on the organisation and [social dynamics](#) within practices if whole-practice functioning and overall patient care are to be improved."

More information: Hammond, J. et al. Slaying the dragon myth: an ethnographic study of receptionists in UK general practice. *British Journal of General Practice*.

Provided by University of Manchester

Citation: Slaying the dragon myth: A study of receptionists in UK general practice (2013, February 25) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-02-dragon-myth-receptionists-uk.html>

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