



## Triage: Getting it Right – Its Crucial

In the health industry, triage literally means the sorting of patients, based on their illness and other factors, into categories that determine the urgency and extent of medical care required.

Practice staff are required to ask a series of questions to assess a patient's health status and to determine the urgency of their situation. Common questions and subsequent actions include; record the patients name and phone number; what is the patient's age; nature of their problem; duration of their symptoms; severity of their problem; and has the patient had any previous major health problems.

### **Triage Process:**

- Assess the patient
- Make a judgement
- Prioritise medical need
- Implement 'accepted' protocols
- Document / report

Resources such as wall chart guides and flip cards are an excellent reference to assist staff in determining which category a patient may come under and hence determine the urgency of their needs.

### **Suggested Categories:**

- **Emergency** - Immediate
- **Urgent** - 5-20 minutes
- **Interrupt GP** - asap
- **Today** - Same Day
- **Within 24 Hours**

To meet the current Standards, Practices are required to document the Practices systems in their Policy and Procedures Manual. Written documentation should include practical approaches as to how the Practice anticipates, identifies, and manages urgent medical matters.

To do this Practices may reserve 'unbooked' appointment times during normal opening hours for patients with urgent medical needs. Prior to putting calls on hold, staff could also be trained to ask if the matter is urgent when a patient, carer or family member contacts the Practice. All non-clinical staff should have triage training and evidence of such should be kept in staff files. (Even if the Practice Nurse is responsible for triage – reception are the first point of contact and can not always rely on a Nurse being available.)

### **References:**

- *South East NSW DGP - POP GUNS Guide* [www.senswdgp.com.au](http://www.senswdgp.com.au)
- *Dandenong DGP - Triage Wall chart & Flip Cards* [www.dddgp.com.au](http://www.dddgp.com.au)
- *RACGP Standards for General Practices, 3rd Edition* [www.racgp.org.au](http://www.racgp.org.au)
- *GPA Information Sheets - What is Triage and Urgent Medical Matters* [www.gpa.net.au](http://www.gpa.net.au)

Note: This Fact Sheet is provided in conjunction with the GPA ONLINE *plus* Triage Presentation.