

Date: 16 July 2025

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## Physician Associate

Watling Street Practice employs a Physician Associate (PA).

Our PA is an experienced and trusted professional working within our Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT).

## Background

PAs were introduced in the UK around 2003–2005 to support doctors and help meet NHS workforce shortages.

For the first decade, their presence was limited and low-profile, mainly in pilot schemes.

During 2015–2019, as PA numbers started increasing due to NHS workforce plans and government support, some doctors began expressing concerns.

Issues raised included:

- Scope of practice ambiguity.
- Lack of regulation (until the GMC announced regulation from 2024).
- Confusion among patients about roles.

During 2022–2023 some online medical communities saw rising criticism, especially from junior doctors and consultants.

Concerns sharpened after incidents involving:

- Reports of PAs performing duties outside their competence.
- Increasing presence of PAs in hospital rotas, sometimes replacing doctor posts.
- GMC regulatory delays and unclear prescribing rights.

The negative narrative peaked in early 2024 when the GMC began registering PAs resulting in professional bodies like the Royal College of Anaesthetists and Royal College of Emergency Medicine issuing cautious or critical statements about PA roles.

## Watling Street Practice

At Watling Street Practice, we take seriously any concerns expressed over patient safety and with regard to our PA any questions about role clarity and training differences. As a result, since our first PA was employed in 2019, we have ensured systems are in place to support our PA and to remove risk to patients.

Those systems include:

- Our PA has a GP as a named mentor. Together they have regular reviews;
- We have a Supervising GP working on site and available to all our Nurse Teams and our Allied Health Professionals, including our PA;

# Watling Street Practice Statement



- Our Supervising GP is available for all questions, for debriefing, for referral guidance, to issue prescriptions if needed and to review a patient should one of our MDT feel a second opinion would be beneficial;
- Our PA debriefs with the Supervising GP after each session. During the debrief session our PA will discuss each patient, observations, treatment plan agreed, follow up plans (if needed) and agree on any medication required<sup>1</sup>.

Watling Street Practice agree that questions raised about the safety of a PA are fair and appropriate but only where:

## **A PA is inexperienced**

- In Watling Street Practice, our PA has over 5 years (@2025) experience working in this role.

## **The PA is not aware of professional boundaries**

- In Watling Street Practice, our PA is fully aware of the role's professional boundaries.

## **The PA undertakes tasks outside of their clinical competence**

- In Watling Street Practice, our PA is fully aware of their clinical competence and does not exceed those trained competencies when supporting our patients.

## **The PA is not willing to ask questions**

- In Watling Street Practice, our PA always has a Supervising GP working on site, available for the duration of all shifts and as importantly our PA has good relationships with our Supervising GPs and is very happy to seek their advice, support and/or guidance.

## **The PA Issues Medication to Patients**

- In Watling Street Practice, our PA does not issue medication to patients. Medication is issued by the Supervising GP.

## **A PA is not supported**

- In Watling Street Practice, our PA has a named GP providing mentorship, professional support and guidance over and above the support offered by the Supervising GP.

## **A PA works independently, and/or alone**

- In Watling Street Practice, our PA never works alone. Our PA is always part of our larger MDT.

## **A Patient could be confused about the role the PA is fulfilling**

- In Watling Street Practice, our PA wears a badge which shows both name and role. Further our PA works in a room that shows both name and role.

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<sup>1</sup> This debrief model is a tried and tested approach that has been used successfully for all Trainee GPs who have passed through our practice over the past 30+ years