

Practice Managers Pathways

What we know...

There are currently 1700 Practice Managers registered as members of the Australian Association of Practice Managers across Australia. However we know many Practice Managers are not currently members of the Association.

In recent years the role of the Practice Manager has changed dramatically as the environment of general practices has changed. The trend today is towards much larger general practices and as a consequence the role of the Practice Manager has taken on greater business focus.

The majority of Practice Managers are female.

The majority of Practice Managers manage single site practices.

The average working day is about 9 hours.

Practice Managers

To understand the variety of Practice Managers and their experiences we defined who they are against some characteristics. These are described below each persona.



Type of Practice (GP, Allied Health, Specialists)	GP	GP	GP	GP	Specialist	Allied Health: Dentist
Size of Practice (Solo, Group, Corporate)	Solo	Corporate	Group (reasonable size)	Group - Aboriginal Medical service (AMS)	Group	Solo
Location of Practice (Rural and remote, Urban (city/metro), Regional)	Urban Metro	Urban city	Metro	Rural and Remote	Urban Metro	Regional
Pathway to become a Practice Manager (Evolving, Professional, Specialised skills e.g. Bus Mgt)	Evolving	Professional	Evolving	Evolving	Evolving/Professional	Evolving
Experience as a Practice Manager (85% over 50 years old and 18 years experience; Experienced at least 3 years, "Green" less than 3 years)	18 yrs + experience	At least 3 years	18 yrs + experience	"Green" less than 3 years	At least 3 years	At least 3 years
Organisational arrangements (Depends on the above)	Report direct to Principal, no staff	Report to corporate entity. Aligned to corporate not practitioners.	Report direct to Principal, some staff	Report to AMS Board and CEO	Reports to multiple specialists. Some non-practitioner staff.	Report direct to Principal, one non-practitioner staff, couple of technical staff e.g. hygienists
Patients socio-economic background	Mixed community	Mixed community	Mixed community	99% indigenous	Mixed community	Mixed community
Style of learning (Myers Briggs e.g. 65% are ENFP/INFP)	ENFP	ISTJ	ENFP	ENFP	ISTJ	ISTJ
Income bracket (\$25K, \$60-\$80K, \$100K plus)	\$35,000	\$80,000	\$60,000	\$25,000	\$60,000	\$60,000
Skills sets (Extent of Computer skills, Technical skills)	Limited computer skills	Broad skill set	Limited computer skills	Limited computer skills	OK skills	Highly technical
Practice Ownership (None, Part ownership, Performance Bonus)	N/A	Performance Bonuses	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Membership with professional association (Yes, No)	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes (25% in AAPM)
Practitioners characteristics (Willingness to change, Background e.g. training, experience)	Less likely to change	Corporate dictates practice	Variety of backgrounds	Usually overseas trained doctors, high turnover, language barriers	Yes, Specialists are willing to change. High delegation to Charlie.	Good attitude to change because 60cents/\$1 revenue is overhead
Extent of role covering all practice management tasks (Shared with others in practice, 100% Practice Mgt tasks done)	100% of all practice management tasks done	Shared with others in the corporate practice	Shared with others in the practice	100% of all practice management tasks done	Shared with others in the practice	Shared with others in the practice

Practice Manager Persona: Jan

Background I am 55 years old. I have been with Dr Bob Cartwright for 15 years (prior to that 2 other GP's and initially as a receptionist).

Drivers and motivations I am caring, have a motherly instinct, I know all the patients, I enjoy interacting with Dr Cartwright. I hold him in high regard because he is excellent at what he does. I have a good work ethic.

Strengths I have business systems in place to handle bookings, claims, payments, subscriptions, ordering, renewals etc. I like to be in control. My time management is good. I meticulously read hard copy information which is sent to me. I am reliable and experienced in what I do.

Desired work experience I like to have a pleasant, uncomplicated, little change to my working days. I like to be helpful within my area of control. I rely on my own experience and what I know. I don't get time to actively seek new information. If I need to know something I will pick up the phone and call Medicare or a colleague in another practice.

Daily interactions I deal with all patients, and Dr Cartwright everyday. I also interact with suppliers, salespeople, call centres, specialists and other professionals for the business. I deal with many health programs offered by government.

Challenges I find IT and new systems and processes a challenge because I have to work them out on my own. I find it hard to stay up to date and know what has changed because I am very busy everyday. I see some of the new younger patients want electronic services, I would like to offer it but it is too hard. Also Dr Cartwright is very set in his ways.

Go about work I follow procedures established by me. I rely on relationships and talking with people as my main way to get information. I have many paper processes in place e.g. bulk billing vouchers, ACIR forms etc.

Biggest concern? Keeping the patient happy and Dr Cartwright. I hate to make mistakes.

Training / Development I do not do lot formally. I read what is sent to me. I am not encouraged by Dr Cartwright to change things or get new ideas because it works now so why change. I keep files of papers which I refer to from time to time.

Support I use the phone a lot. I ring Medicare because of claim rejects and other questions about programs.



Me on holidays at Merimbula

Practice Manager Jan's Typical Day

Jan's day would typically start at 8am by opening the office, turning off the alarm, turning on the lights, air-conditioning and getting the computers on. She puts the urn on and gets 2 cups out ready for coffee for when Dr Cartwright turns up.



BACKGROUND

Jan is 55 years old. She has been with Dr Bob Cartwright for 15 years (prior to that 2 other GP's and initially as a receptionist).

CHALLENGES

Jan finds IT and new systems and processes a challenge because she is on her own to work them out. She finds it hard to stay up to date and know what has changed. She sees that some of the new younger patients want electronic services, would like to offer it but it is too hard. Also Dr Cartwright is very set in his ways.

Notes

- When there is a problem with rejected claims I have to contact Medicare. It is time consuming.

My feelings

Time

Typical daily activities:

Onsite

The practice site is my office. I do have a desk, but I am often not there for long.

Offsite

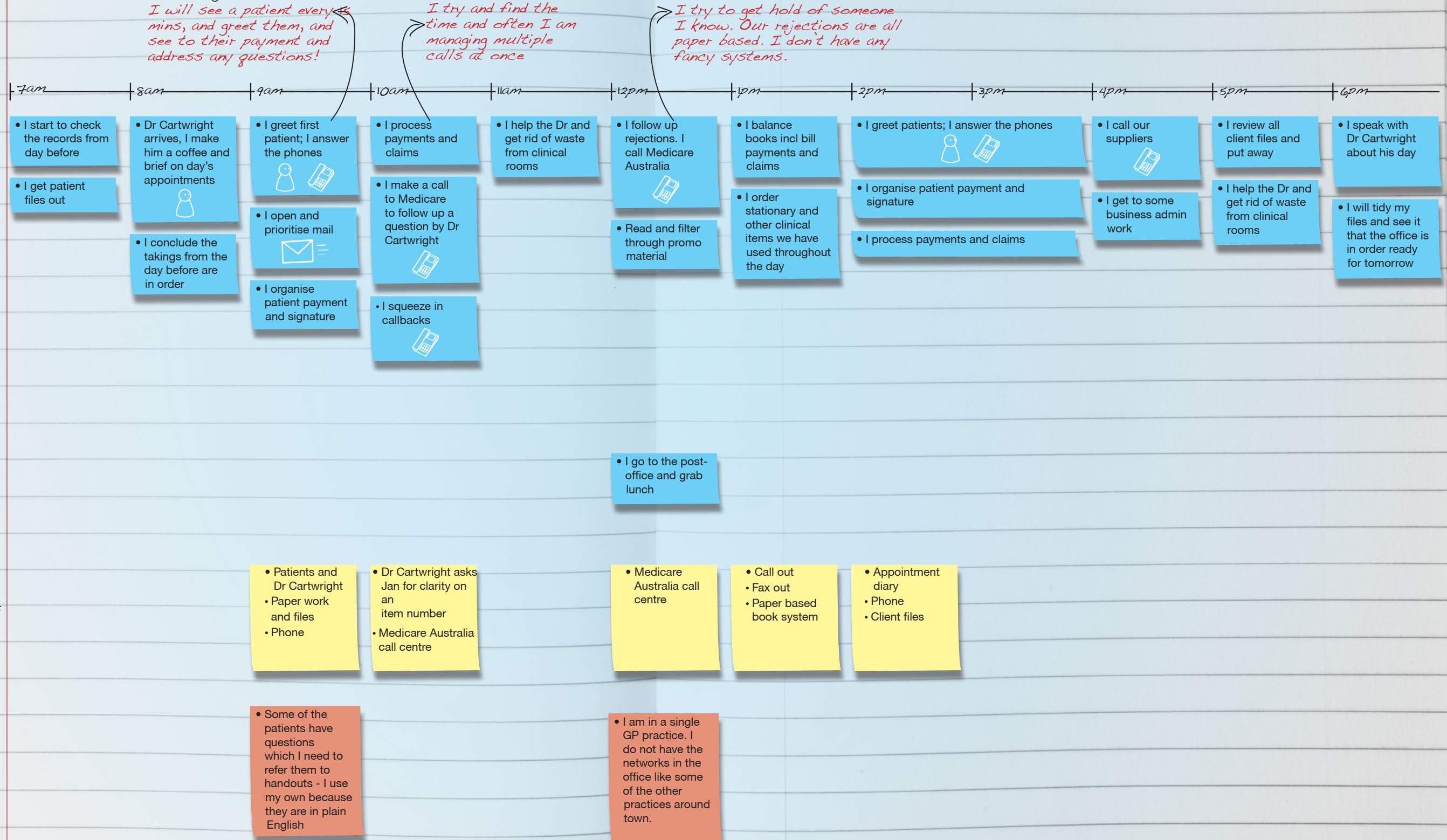
Interactions

- people
- paper products
- online products
- services

→ - comes to me

↪ - I initiate

Issues/risks



Practice Manager Persona: Nicole



I love being organised!

Background I am 33 years old. I have been working with Healthy Corporate now for 5 years. I am professional trained as a Practice Manager I completed the Professional Development Program through the AAPM a few years ago.

Drivers and motivations I enjoy the corporate context, the professionalism and the opportunity to advance into management.

Strengths I have strong leadership skills, and I enjoy supporting and guiding non-practice staff. I am a reference point for many practitioners in this corporate practice. I have strong communication skills and can multi-task. I deal with conflict and drive a strong performance based culture.

Desired work experience I after experience which will help me move up the corporate ladder. I see my work as a profession and I work hard with my peers and staff. I after ongoing training and developmental opportunities.

Daily interactions I deal mostly with my own staff. I also deal with head office. I have a more administrative relationship with the Doctors at my practice. I deals with government agencies and other professionals such as allied health. I also deal with software companies who provide our practice management software.

Challenges I have staff management issues, patient complaints and resolving issues with doctors when issues arise with procedures or technical questions affecting their work. I have to meet corporate objectives and this means working hard to ensure the practice is profitable and productive.

Go about work I go about my work quickly and often in a rush! I prioritise and delegate.

Biggest concern? Not meeting head office expectations.

Training / Development I enrol in formal and informal training and education through Australia Association of Practice Managers (AAPM).

Support I will use email as a first point of requesting information. I can shoot of a number of emails and get to the responses when I have time. I prefer this instead of calls. I will refer to head office first if I comes across something I am not sure about.

Practice Manager Nicole's Typical Day

Nicole's day would typically start at 7.30am, though she keeps her phone on during the night because doctors can call at any hour e.g. 5.30am and say they are not coming into the practice the following day. She can have quite late days, up to 10.30pm if required.



My feelings

Time

Typical daily activities:

Onsite

I am in my office at my desk for most of the day

Offsite

Interactions

- ☐ people
- ☐ paper products
- ☐ online products
- ☐ services

↗ - comes to me

↘ - I initiate

Issues/risks

BACKGROUND

Nicole is 33 years old. She has been working with Healthy Corporate now for 5 years. She is professionally trained as a Practice Manager.

CHALLENGES

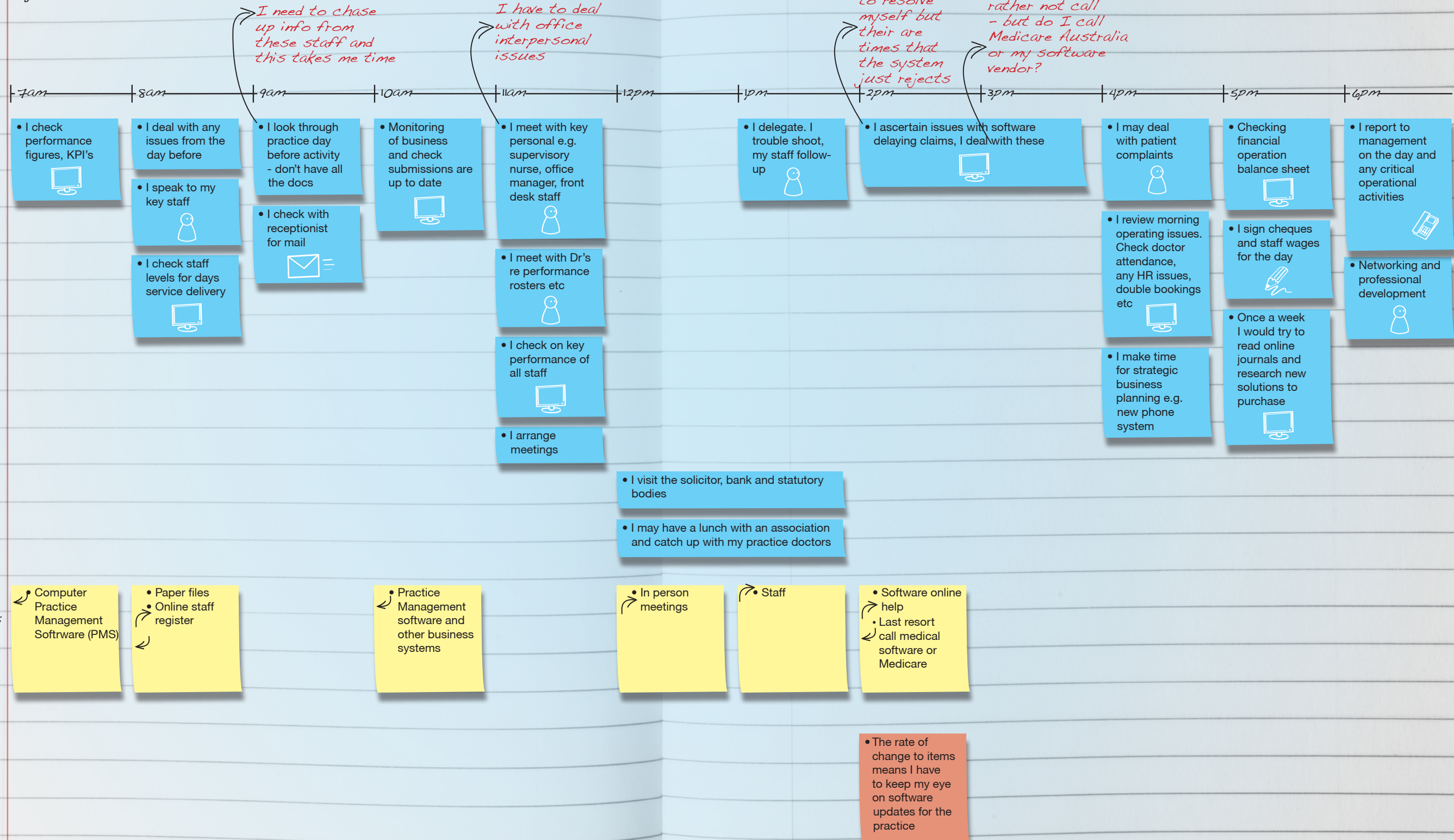
Nicole has staff management issues and deals with doctors when issues arise with procedures or technical questions affecting their work. Nicole has to meet corporate objectives. Nicole also deals with complaints.

I want to resolve myself but there are times that the system just rejects

This is a decision point - I would rather not call - but do I call Medicare Australia or my software vendor?

Notes

- ☐ The rate of change in item numbers and the updates to software needed is often not in sync. It is a real job to see if rejected claims are the software problems or Medicare. I have to call both Medicare and our software vendors to resolve. It is confusing.
- ☐ There is a reliance on third parties and software vendors to know we have the right software. It costs to upgrade!



Practice Manager Persona: Betty



Background I am 55 years old. I have been working with the Good Health Group - group of 6 doctors for the last 5 years. Prior to this I had over 10 years experience in other practices.

Drivers and motivations I love controlling the practice and being in charge. I love the responsibility and knowing that everything is under control. I like to make sure the doctors can be doctors.

Strengths I am systematic and always busy making the practice tick. I protect the doctors time and makes sure that they are not bothered by unimportant stuff. I am a bit of a mother hen and I keep things in control. I am extremely organised and I like using manual systems.

Desired work experience I am after direct control of the day to day operations, the administrative side. I enjoy having a team and delegating to the younger girls. I am not too big on IT systems and I still run a paper based booking system.

Daily interactions I interact with my staff, the doctors in the practice, the suppliers, the peak bodies, specialists, Medicare and other government bodies. In many ways any person who wants to get to the doctors I act as a strong gatekeeper to the GP's.

Challenges I struggle to adopt new technology because I dont have time to learn. I know my younger staff are technology savvy but I resist. I am time poor and often rushed.

Go about work I go about my work very systematically and in an organised way. I work my team strongly and I demand a lot from them each day. Any important matters I do myself, and all decisions must come by me because the administrative stuff rests with me ultimately.

Biggest concern? Keeping control and making sure the GP's can do their job.

Training / Development I know what I need to know. I dont have time for training. I will get staff in with skills if I need them.

Support I refer to Division of General Practice for updates and information. I will call Medicare if I have to, but I have had some bad experiences in the past so I try to resolve in house.

Practice Manager Betty's Typical Day

Betty opens up the office and ensures everything is ready for business. She makes note of the office to see if there is anything out of place to raise with her staff when they arrive.



BACKGROUND

Betty is 55 years old. She has been working with the Good Health Group - group of 6 doctors for the last 5 years. Prior to this Betty has had experience in other practices.

CHALLENGES

Betty struggles to adopt new technology. She knows her younger staff are technology savvy but Betty resists using these skills. Betty is time poor and is often rushed.

Notes

- The amount of time I spend on rejected claims is quite a lot. The only way to resolve this is to call a call centre. Is there an easier way?
- It is really frustrating to be thrown between software providers and Medicare.

My feelings

Time

Typical daily activities:

Onsite

I have my own office and I will spend most of my day walking throughout the practice and keeping my eye on things.

Offsite

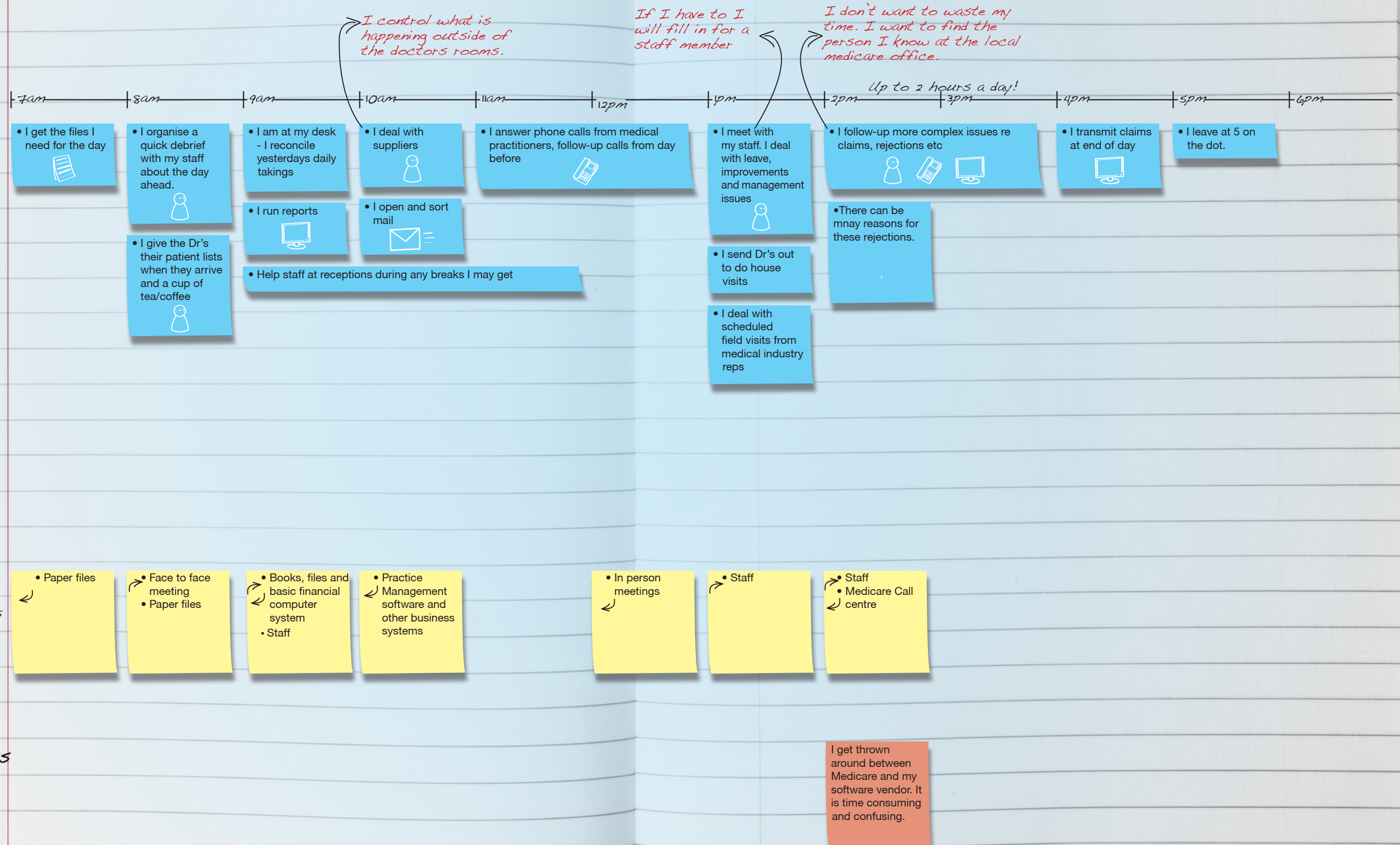
Interactions

- people
- paper products
- online products
- services

→ - comes to me

↪ - I initiate

Issues/risks



Practice Manager Persona: Beryl

Background I am 45 years old. I have always lived in Angurugu, on Groote Eylandt. I am very well known and has a strong level of respect in the community. I have worked for AMS group of doctors for last 3 years.

Drivers and motivations I have a strong interest in the health and wellbeing of people. I have strong relationships with the community. I am passionate about improving the health outcomes for my community.

Strengths I understand the local health needs. I have access to Medicare and other Indigenous services. I am a great coach and mentor. I like teaching others.

Desired work experience I have basic training as an Aboriginal Health worker and I desire to learn on the job and i do this by working in the capacity of a registered nurse. I work in a small practice and I want to give the most help I can.

Daily interactions I interact with Indigenous Access, Medicare Branch, Local private practices, funding bodies and other AMS groups.

Challenges I face funding challenges so this is an ongoing concern. Access to online health information is difficult because of internet network coverage. Retaining staff is an ongoing challenge. Some communication boundaries with overseas trained Dr's. The Community board (elected) is not made up of medical professionals so they don't often understand the business needs or issues facing my practice.

Go about work I go about my work with lots of energy and care. I work hard to get as much done as possible for my patients. I rely on interactions with Medicare and other bodies.

Biggest concern? Future of the board, CEO role (not filled), funding patient/community welfare and access. Delivering programs and services in difficult circumstances.

Training / Development I have basic training as an Aboriginal Health worker. I do some formal training every now and then but I am mostly self taught. I use the IAP, OATSIH, AHNMRC. Self paced and inhouse is preferred.

Support I will go to IAP for support, other AMS groups and learn from registered nurses and internet (where possible).



That's me -in the background - with a community member I have known for many years

Practice Manager Beryl's Typical Day

Beryl starts the day at 8am and opens the practice. She is usually the first one there. The AMS she works in is a 2 doctor practice.



My feelings

Time

Typical daily activities:

Onsite

I am located in my AMS and there will be times I leave the office and interact with the community

Offsite

Interactions

- ☐ people
- ☐ paper products
- ☐ online products
- ☐ services

→ - comes to me

↪ - I initiate

Issues/risks

Notes

BACKGROUND

Beryl is 45. She has always lived in Angurugu, on Groote Eylandt. She is very well known and has a strong level of respect in the community. She has worked for AMS group of doctors for last 5 years

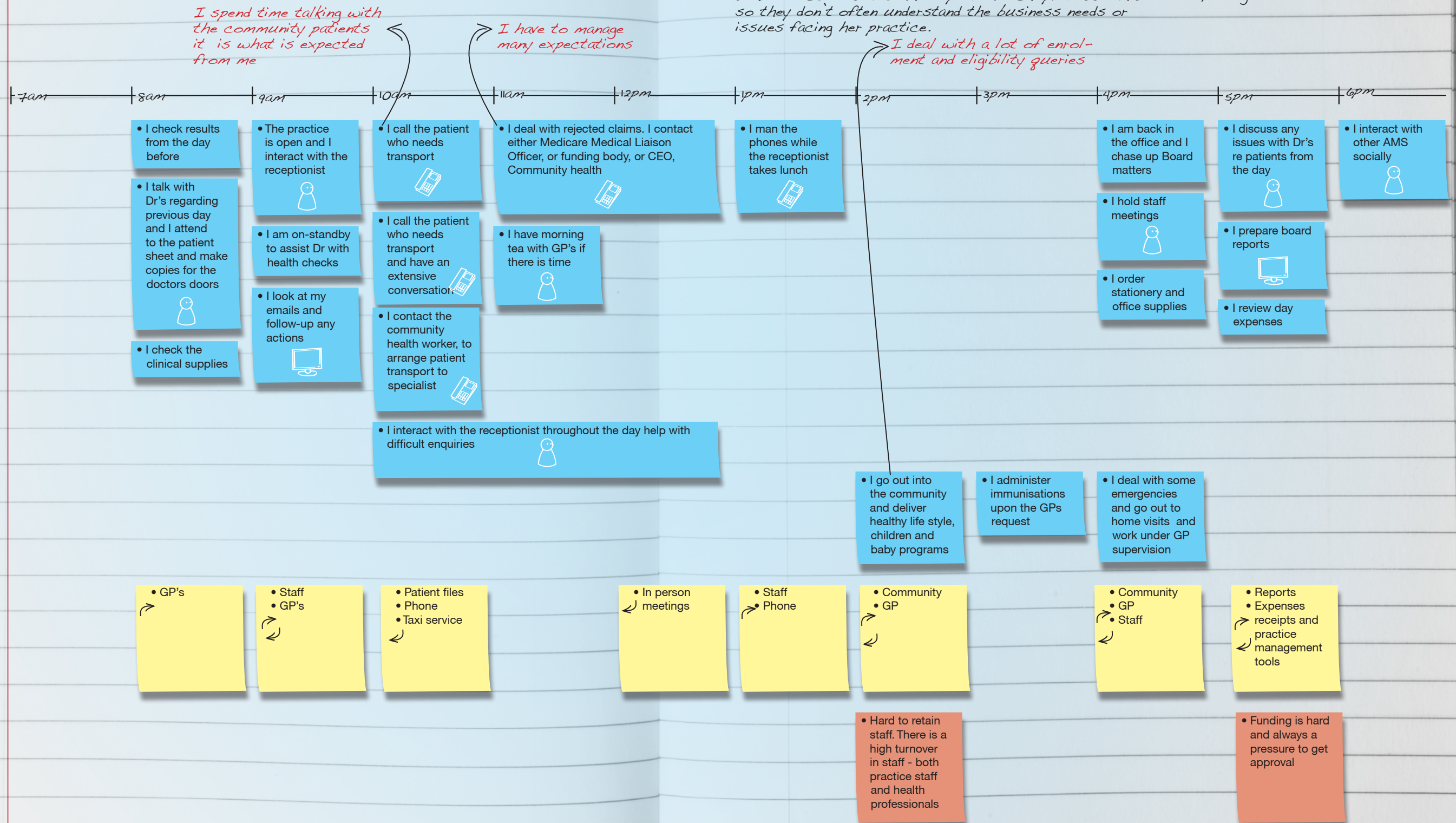
CHALLENGES

Beryl faces funding challenges so this is an ongoing concern. Access to online health information is difficult because of internet network coverage. Retaining staff is an ongoing challenge. Some communication boundaries with overseas trained Dr's. The Community board (elected) is not made up of medical professionals so they don't often understand the business needs or issues facing her practice.

The community is such an integral part to this work. I can't treat the work as only administrative. I invest time in building relationships and organising other services to help.

The high turnover of staff makes it hard to keep a consistent experience for my people

I play multiple roles: administrative, clinical, managerial!



Practice Manager Persona: Charlie

Background I am 45 years old. I have been working with the chiropractic group of practitioners for the last 5 years. I love working in the Kiara Chiropractic Wellness clinic.

Drivers and motivations I enjoy the people interactions - with the specialists and the patients. I work hard and like to be acknowledged for my work.

Strengths I am patient and like to get things right. I pride myself on being a "people person" and being very customer focussed. I keep the office well organised and tidy.

Desired work experience I am after a high level of people interaction. I have a strong sense of team and like to keep connected with all staff, the specialists and regular patients.

Daily interactions I interact with patients, staff and Medicare call centre and software providers to clarify claims and processes.

Challenges I use software to manage the practice. A real challenge is getting the right level of IT support. I find I have to get on the phone to resolve most of the system issues. I am adept at creating working solutions even if the technology does not allow it.

Go about work I delegate work to other staff in the practice. I find I deal with requests for the specialists such as typing up letters for GP's. I lock away time each day to do this.

Biggest concern? There never seems to be enough time in a day! I have to manage my time tightly to get through all the sorts of work I need to do. I also have to be flexible to work with changing appointments and specialists needs.

Training / Development I have come from being a receptionist in my first job when I was 18. I hold a diploma in practice management. I use e-reference training modules to keep to date.

Support I will refer to peers in my profession. I have strong networks built over the last 20 plus years. I will use Medicare call centre and online references and software providers for support.



This me at my desk!

Practice Manager Charlie's Typical Day

Charlie's typical day is to get the office open and ready for business. She does not mind starting early and being the first one there. Charlie likes to check in with the receptionist each morning.



Notes

BACKGROUND

Charlie is 45. She has been working with specialist chiropractic group of practitioners for the last 5 years. She loves working in the Kiara Chiropractic Wellness clinic.

CHALLENGES

Charlie uses software to manage the practice. A real challenge is getting the right level of IT support. She finds that she has to get on the phone to resolve most of the system issues. Charlie is adept at creating working solutions even if the technology does not allow it.

□ The amount of time I spend on rejected claims is quite a lot. The only way to resolve this is to call a call centre. Is there an easier way?

□ It is really frustrating to be thrown between software providers and Medicare. Knowing who to call first?

My feelings

Time

Typical daily activities:

Onsite

I am located in the clinic. I have my own desk and office.

Offsite

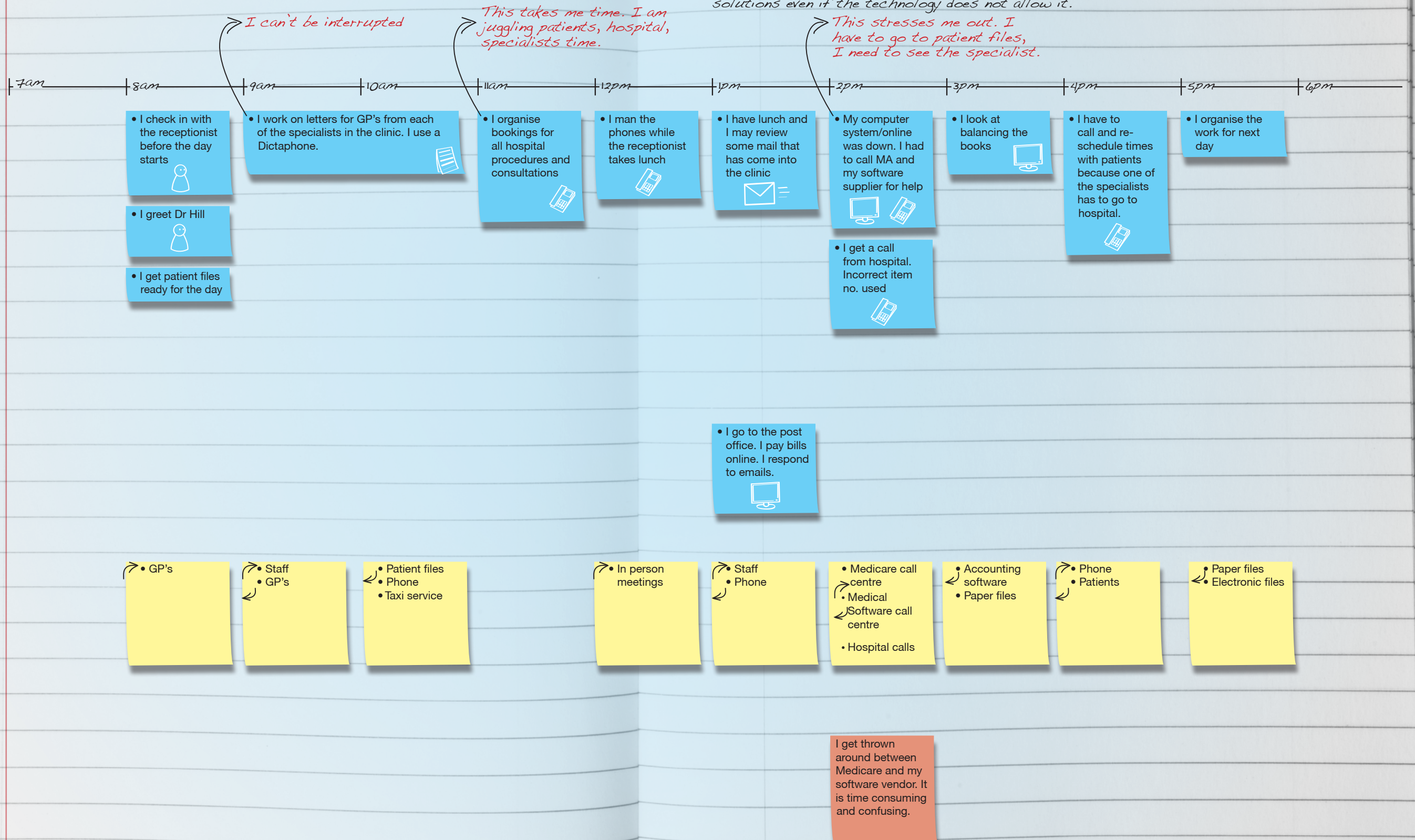
Interactions

- people
- paper products
- online products
- services

→ - comes to me

← - I initiate

Issues/risks



Practice Manager Persona: Mary

- Background** I am 39 years old. I am a vibrant and energetic practice manager at Smart smiles dentistry. I grew up in the country and enjoy working in the community of Parkes.
- Drivers and motivations** I am really motivated by doing a great job. For me a job done well is a good job. I love a sense of team and having a role that adds value.
- Strengths** I am efficient, I like to think I use my time really well. I know what to watch for in the business: profit and cost KPI's. I likes to solve problems.
- Desired work experience** I likes my experience to be easy and efficient. I like to access accurate information when I need it. I like to have a single point of contact. I want to keep to task so resolving things with the right person is key.
- Daily interactions** I interact with the practice staff - the 'gals'. This includes the receptionist, the technicians. I also interacts with suppliers, tradespeople and other professionals. Medicare is a common interaction when claims go wrong.
- Challenges** I find new initiatives by government a bit of a challenge to get across. I look for the most efficient way to get across all the changes. This is often not the case. I also continuously face challenges around delegation and managing all the tasks each day.
- Go about work** I go about my work in a very organised way. I use a task list. I have a clip board with all the things I need to do each day. I have put in business systems to make this as streamlined as possible each day.
- Biggest concern?** Making sure the business runs as smooth as possible.
- Training / Development** I informally learn through my own network and suppliers. I refer to the local Medicare Office if I have any government related questions. I am part of an association (AAPM) and partake in some training they offer
- Support** I use my network, the 'gals' in the office, professional groups, internet.



This is me - second row, first from left - with our team at Smart Smiles Dentistry. I work for Dr Michaels the dentist.

Practice Manager Mary's Typical Day

Mary's typical day is to start the day with the other girls in the office and review the coming day. She is very organised and likes to have a good idea about what is going on in the practice. She also makes herself available to the staff to handle any queries and business matters.



BACKGROUND

Mary is a vibrant and energetic practice manager at Smart smiles dentistry. She grew up in the country and enjoys working in the community of Parkes.

CHALLENGES

Mary finds new initiatives by government a bit of a challenge to get across. She looks for the most efficient way to get across all the changes. This is often not the case. Mary also continuously faces challenges around delegation and managing all the tasks each day.

Notes

- The amount of time I spend on rejected claims is quite a lot. The only way to resolve this is to call a call centre. Is there an easier way?
- It is really frustrating to be thrown between software providers and Medicare. Knowing who to call first?
- There are many interactions between dental and medical practices
- There are multiple schedules of items and services I need to deal with (DpHFA, Medicare Australia, DVA)

My feelings

Time

Typical daily activities:

Onsite

I am located in the clinic. I have my own desk and office.

Offsite

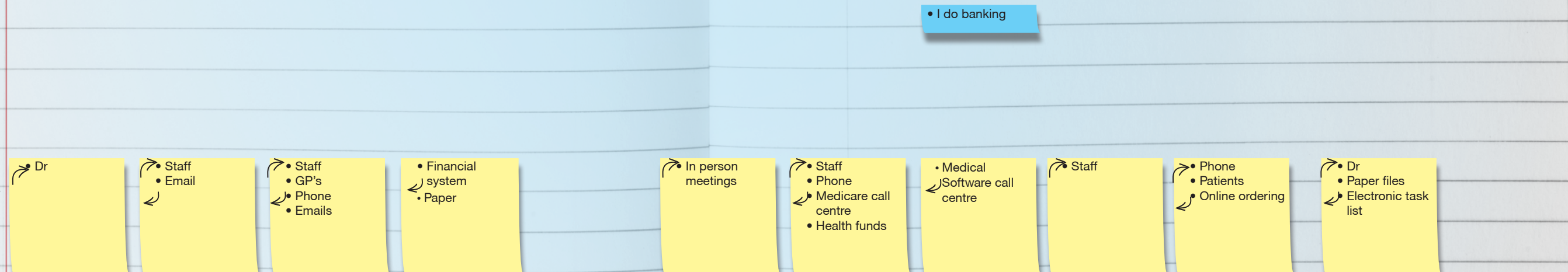
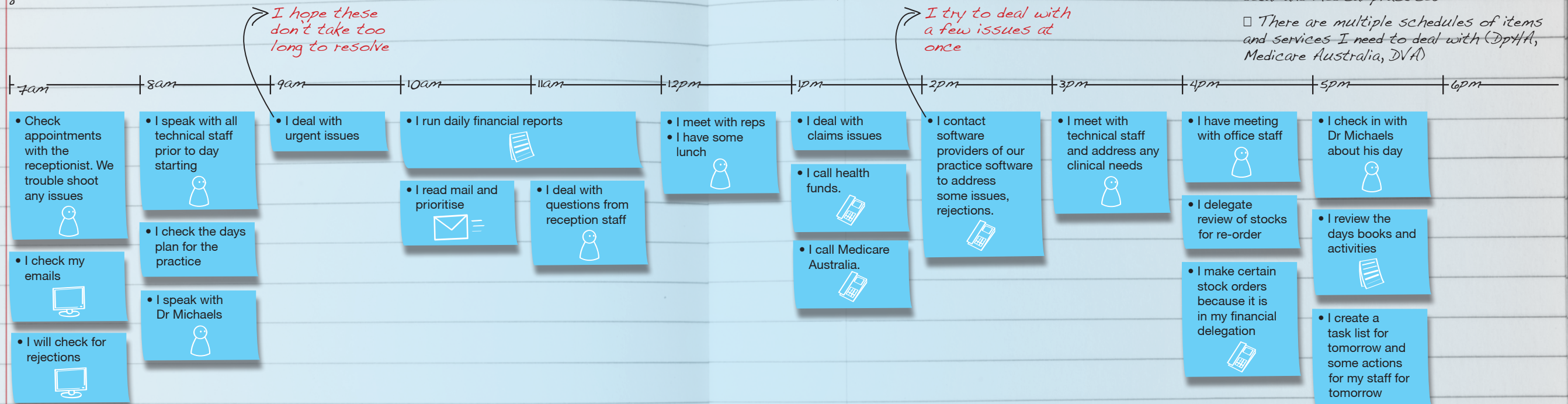
Interactions

- people
- paper products
- online products
- services

→ - comes to me

← - I initiate

Issues/risks



I get thrown around between Medicare and my software vendor. It is time consuming and confusing.

Scenario A: Practice Managers Typical Week



The management of any medical practice depends on the size of the practice, location of the practice, organisational structure, number of employees, scope of medical services provided, patient/client demographic. The "Practice Manager" role is evolving and depending on the above context their role is can be quite different.

The following list shows all the possible tasks which a Practice Manager has to consider in their role which can occur to varying degrees on a weekly basis.

Notes

- ☐ The primary aim of my role is to make sure the practice is profitable.
- ☐ In some of the larger practices where there are more staff, as a Practice Manager I can really hone in on business KPI's and develop the Practice.
- ☐ I am responsible for ensuring the practice hangs together. This includes organising leave for all non-practitioner and practitioner staff. I have to be seen as fair.

Time

Major Tasks

Specific tasks within each Major task:

Issues/
risks

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	
Major Tasks	• I need to make our practice attractive and marketable	• I look after the practice	• I make sure the health professional feel comfortable and can do their job	• I have a project management role in the practice	• I manage billing (Item claiming) • I ensure right governance is in place	• I look for income sources • I do business reporting and watch KPI's
Specific tasks within each Major task:	• 1.1 I want to attract and retain patients • 1.2 I want to successfully win work such as tenders to deliver health service • 1.3 I want to attract and retain good health professionals • 1.4 I look at my practice social and cultural make-up. I look for emerging changes which may mean changing the practice	• 2.1 I manage staff leave including doctors • 2.2 I make sure facilities are in top condition • 2.3 Staff have all the tools they need • 2.4 I take care of any incidents	• 3.1 I advise health professional about how to bill make sure they are fully aware of their decisions • 3.2 I make sure health professionals do not have to worry about what forms and process • 3.3 I make sure they have everything in place • 3.4 I am here to maximise patient contact time and minimise non-patient contact -time. • 3.5 I am here to answer any questions by the health professionals	• 4.1 I will lead and drive change in the practice e.g. adding a new room, moving online • 4.2 I make sure staff and health professionals know about changes that affect them • 4.3 I find out what is happening from places I trust	• 5.1 I chase up rejected claims. I deal with Medicare and software vendors • 5.2 I make sure we know what we are billing for now and with any changes • 5.3 I want to know when we may trigger an audit because our profile has changed	• 6.1 I set up policies for the health professionals to follow, to make sure billing is optimised and is done correctly • 6.2 Multiple health professionals will often share patients so I make sure records are kept and accessible • 7.1 I try to reduce reliance on Medicare income • 7.2 I look to rent out our rooms to other health professionals • 8.1 I aim to keep our running costs as low as a percent of our total income as possible • 8.2 I ensure we have at least 85% occupancy in rooms/week

Being able to fit this in!

Scenario B: Practice Managers I want to attract and retain good health professionals



The viability and success of a practice is a top priority for the Practice Manager. The ability to attract and retain good staff is vital. This pathway shows an experience that a Practice Manager, in a private medium practice experienced from the early stages of marketing the practice to attracting a GP and then ensuring the GP is registered and able to practice. Registration plays a key role here.

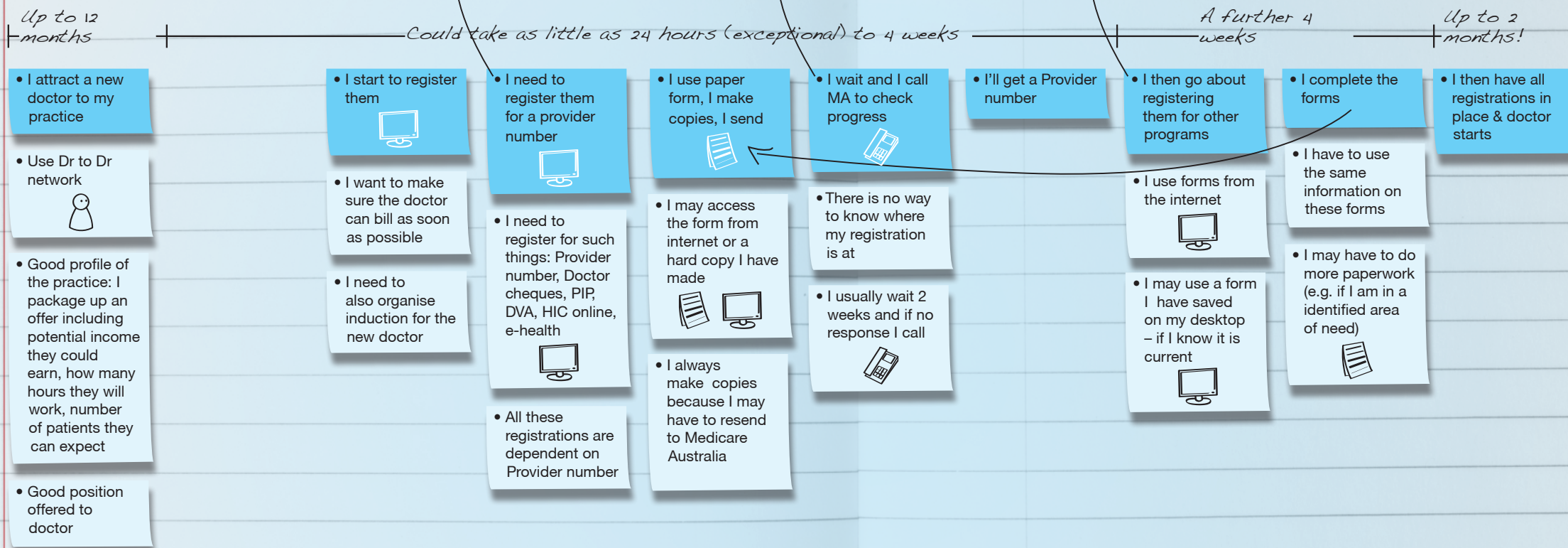
Notes

- Request for registration ONCE for all types
- Online self check of progress of applications
- Proactive service from MA re registrations

My feelings

Time

Typical daily activities and specific tasks



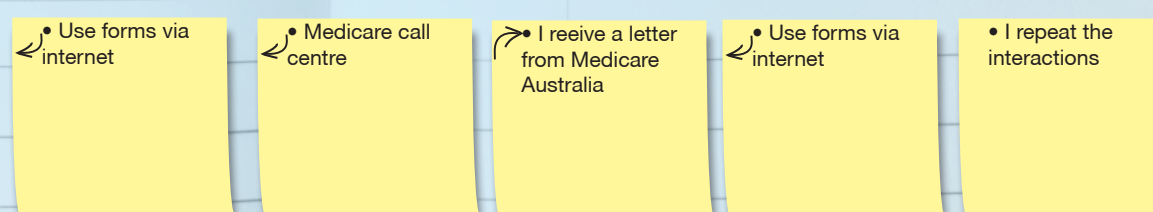
Interactions

- people
- paper products
- online products
- services

→ - comes to me

← - I initiate

Issues/risks



The repetition of steps and form filling is time consuming. Why can't I register once for everything?

Scenario C: Practice Managers

I make sure staff and doctors know about changes that affect them



The Practice Manager is to ensure all the staff and doctors know their obligations and responsibilities. The rate of change in the medical industry is quite high. Not all change is adopted there is a process to determine whether the practice will change. Below is an example of an item change.

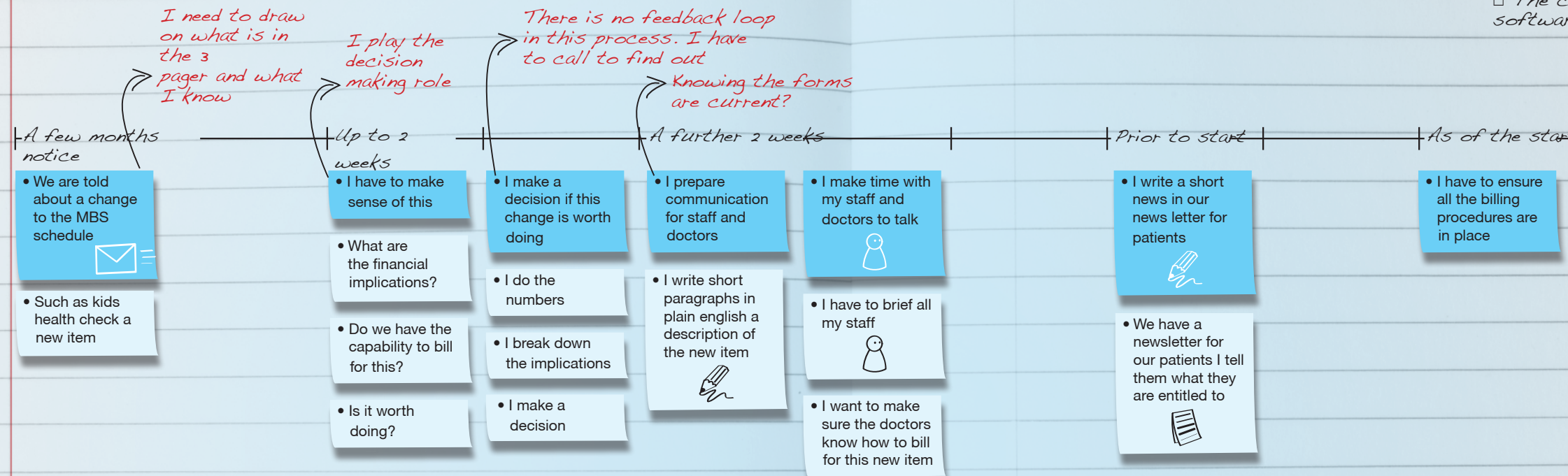
Notes

- It would be great to bring out a product called something like "Education for receptionists in Medical practices"
- I go through the decision making process if taking up a new item is worthwhile for our practice.
- The changes also mean that software will have to be updated.

My feelings

Time

Typical daily activities and specific tasks:



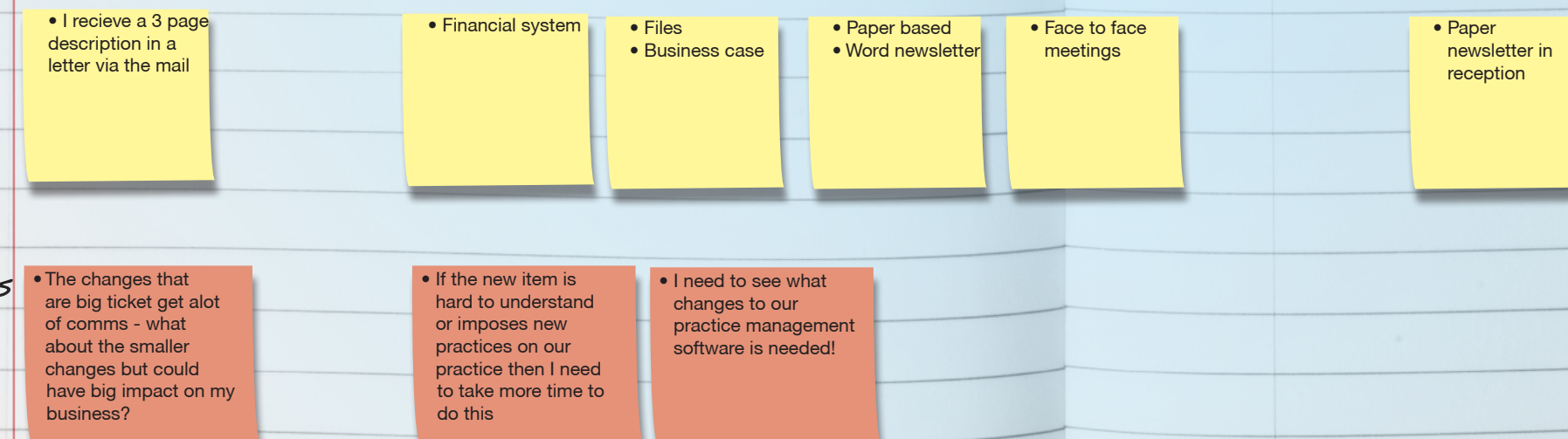
Interactions

- people
- paper products
- online products
- services

→ - comes to me

↩ - I initiate

Issues/risks



Scenario D: Practice Managers I follow up rejected claims from an EPC item.

This can be frustrating because of the time taken to review and assess every rejection

I am on the phone to Medicare least 45 mins a day!

Making sure rejections are sorted out every day is critical. This is our practice income!

Notes

- The amount of time I spend on rejected claims is quite a lot - in some cases at least 45 minutes a day on the phone. The only way to resolve this is to call a call centre. Is there an easier way?
- It is really frustrating to be thrown between software providers and Medicare.
- Following up rejections is part of my everyday. I just accept I need to be on the phone everyday. We work through everything eventually.

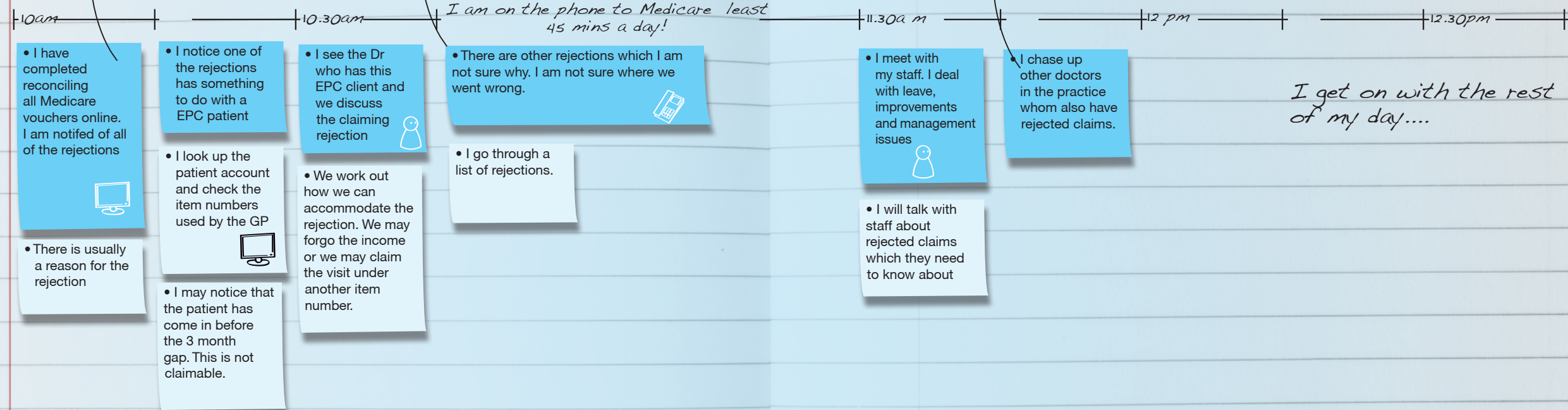
My feelings

Time

Typical daily activities:

Onsite

I at the Practice in my office



Offsite

Interactions

- people
- paper products
- online products
- services

- - comes to me
- ↪ - I initiate

Issues/risks

There is confusion with EPC item claiming if not claimed within the "rules". Relying on patients to remember is a challenge

This is a daily event for me. It is not helpful when I need to call back and forth between MA and my software vendor.