What happens when you are referred by your GP to see a specialist?

This leaflet describes what you can expect to happen when your GP refers you to see a specialist or consultant, at a hospital or a community health centre.

Seeing your GP:





Why have I been referred?

Your GP will discuss with you and, if appropriate, your carer, about why a referral is being recommended. It is usually because your GP wants a specialist's help in deciding on the best way to treat your condition. This might involve referring you for tests or investigations that cannot be carried out in a GP surgery. Your GP will also discuss with you what choices there are for where you can be referred.

How will I hear about where and when the appointment is?

GP practices and hospitals use different ways of arranging appointments:

- Your GP practice may give you a reference number and a password you can use to book, change or cancel your appointment online or by phone. In time, more and more GP practices will refer patients in this way.
- You may receive a letter from the hospital confirming your appointment. You need to reply as soon as possible and tell the hospital if you can attend on the date offered.
- Alternatively, sometimes patients receive a letter asking them to phone the hospital to make an appointment with a specialist.

Seeing the specialist:



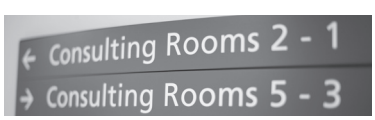
What happens if I need a test or procedure?

Normally, if the specialist thinks you need any test, investigation or surgical procedure, the specialist is responsible for:

- arranging the test, investigation or procedure, explaining how and when you will receive a date and what to do if the date is not suitable for you; and
- giving you the results and explaining what they mean (this may be done in a separate appointment with the specialist or by letter).

What happens if I need new medicines?

The specialist might suggest prescribing new medicines for you or might want to make changes to the medicines that you are already taking.



The specialist is responsible for:

- giving you the first prescription for any new medicine that you need to start taking straightaway; and
- giving you enough medicine to last at least the first seven days, unless you need to take the medicine for a shorter time. After this, you will need to contact your GP surgery if another prescription is required.

It is important that you understand whether you need to start any new medicines, or whether the specialist has changed the medicines you already take, so ask the specialist if you are not sure. In some cases, your GP will not be able to prescribe certain medicines and you will need to continue to receive these from the hospital. You will be told about this at your appointment.

What if I need a Fit Note (previously known as Sick Note)?

If you need to be certified as unfit for work following treatment by a specialist:

- The specialist should issue you with a Fit Note.
- The Fit Note should cover the period they expect you to be unfit to work, or until your next contact with the specialist.

You should not need to see your GP to get a Fit Note following hospital treatment, unless your inability to work is unexpectedly prolonged.

What if I need a follow up appointment?

The specialist will discuss with you whether you should attend hospital for ongoing follow-up care or whether you should be discharged back to your GP. If the specialist thinks you do need to be seen again, the hospital will give you another appointment or tell you when to expect this. If you do not hear anything, please contact the specialist's office, rather than your GP surgery.

What do I do if I have any questions?

- If you have any specific questions related to your hospital care, your specialist will be able to help you with this, so it is important that you make sure you know how you can contact your specialist's office.
- If you have any general questions related to your health, your GP surgery will be able to help you.

When seeing a specialist: **your checklist**

- ☐ If I need to start taking a new medicine straightaway, has the hospital provided me with a supply to last at least seven days (or less, if I need to take the medicine for a shorter period)?
- ☐ Do I understand what the medication is for, how to take it and any side effects?
- ☐ If appropriate, has a Patient Information Leaflet (PIL) been supplied?
- ☐ Do I have the contact details for the specialist's office if I have a question?
- ☐ If I need a Fit Note, has the hospital provided me with one, and does it cover the length of time the specialist expects me to be off work?
- ☐ Do I need a hospital follow up appointment and if so, do I know how this is organised?
- ☐ If appropriate, do I have the names and contact details of organisations who can give me more information or support if I need it?



If you are unsure about any of the questions in the checklist, please make sure you discuss them with a member of staff before you leave hospital.

Access an electronic copy of this leaflet: **www.england.nhs.uk/patientinterface/**

This information can be made available in alternative formats, such as easy read or large print, and may be available in alternative languages, upon request. Please contact **0300 311 22 33** or email: **england.contactus@nhs.net**.

First published: October 2017

This leaflet has been developed with the help and support of NHS England, the British Medical Association and the National Association for Patient Participation:

NHS England

BMA

N.A.P.P.