

Procedures for referring patients

In caring for our patients, we undertake to act in their best interests. Where a patient requires treatment that we are unable to provide, we refer the patient to another professional who is competent to provide it. Where another professional accepts a patient on referral, they are fully responsible for any treatment provided, so we ensure they understand and are content with the proposed treatment prior to undertaking it.

Before referral

The referring clinician will obtain the patient's consent to make the referral. The patient should understand the reasons for referral, what the treatment may involve and any possible complications that may arise. Where possible, they will be given the relevant contact details of the professional that they are being referred to and, if known, the likely timescales.

Before seeing the specialist, the patient will be allowed time to consider the risks involved and to provide any additional information that the specialist will need before starting treatment.

The referral

Where the referral is to a clinician external to the practice, the referral letter will be sent within 10 days of obtaining consent from the patient to make the referral, and includes:

- The referring dentist's name, correspondence address, telephone number and email address.
- The name, address (including the postcode), date of birth and sex of the patient. The telephone number and email address of the patient will also be included to allow appointments to be made quickly and efficiently.
- A summary of the patient's relevant medical and dental history, with the patient's consent.
- A clear indication of the reasons for referral together with any specific needs of the patient (IV sedation, for example) or any particular types of treatment that may not be appropriate.
- If the patient is being referred for diagnosis and/or treatment in relation to a medical problem, the duration of the problem will be included together with the patient's attitude towards or understanding of the situation.
- An indication of whether the patient requires treatment urgently or within a specific timescale.
- The referral letter will be signed by the referring dentist, dated and a copy retained in the patient's notes.
- A copy of the referral letter will be offered to the patient, if requested.

A note of the referral will be recorded in the patient's clinical records.

Accepting a referral

A clinician accepting a patient on referral will only undertake treatment they feel to be appropriate. If the accepting clinician feels that alternative or additional treatment is required, this will be discussed with both the referring clinician and the patient and consent obtained to an amended treatment plan and any costs involved. Changes to the original referral will be confirmed with the referring clinician.

On receipt of a referral, the accepting clinician will contact the patient as soon as possible to arrange an appointment. At the consultation appointment, the patient is given a full explanation of

- the proposed treatment and the timescales involved
- the costs involved and when payment should be made.

The accepting clinician obtains informed consent from the patient before proceeding with the treatment.

On completion of the treatment

The accepting clinician writes to the referring clinician confirming that the treatment has been completed and what follow-up consultations (if any) are required. Changes to the treatment and associated complications are also recorded, together with any obvious concerns that the patient has as a result of the treatment. Where the referral is to another clinician within the practice, this information is provided in the patient's clinical records.

All radiographs sent with the original referral letter are returned to the referring dentist with the report.