

Dear colleagues,

The purpose of this email is to provide you with an update on the restoration of referrals for a specialist opinion across the North West London integrated care system.

Throughout the pandemic services have maintained Two Week Wait and Urgent capacity, although criteria and pathways may have changed. Routine activity was suspended for this period.

From Monday 22 June hospital services will be reopening for routine advice and subsequent routine referrals.

You should seek advice prior to a referral

Services will be offering advice and guidance and colleagues are asked to seek this advice prior to making a routine referral.

Hospital services will respond to advice requests and, where possible, support you in managing the patient in primary care. However, in some cases the advice will be to refer the patient.

Hospital teams will respond rapidly (within 72 hours) to your request, although please be aware that some specialties are still suffering local disruption which may result in some delays.

It is important that advice requests are clear and contain appropriate clinical information to support consultants in making an informed assessment. You may wish to consider using a referral form to capture this information.

Where a routine referral is recommended

You should make the referral through ERS and include a copy of the advice given. You must also include appropriate referral forms and information. Referrals which do not include the advice may be rejected.

Where pathways (and forms) have identified a requirement for specific diagnostics, you may find that these are not currently available. Your referral should note that the diagnostic is not available, and this will not be used as a reason for rejection.

Wherever possible patients will be seen virtually, either through telephone or video clinics. It is important that your referral highlights patients who have specific needs which may require a face to face appointment.

Please warn your patient that waiting times may be extended and that they should advise you if their presenting condition changes. When booking through ERS many services are now using RAS clinics, which means that the Trust will contact the patient to arrange any future appointment time or will be showing as 'defer to provider'.

Where you are certain a referral is required

For some patients it may be clear that a referral is necessary and seeking advice would delay essential care. In these cases, you must follow any published North West London guidelines before referring directly into the service. Your referral will be reviewed by a consultant before being accepted and may be returned with advice. We expect that the majority of referrals will look to obtain advice prior to referral.

Managing patient concerns

Many patients will have anxieties about attending face to face appointment. All hospitals are developing Covid Protected pathways to reduce the risk to patients and staff. Where a patient needs to attend for a face to face appointment, the hospital will provide them with information on the actions they are taking to reduce the risk.

Specific actions for GPs to improve requests for advice and referrals

Many GP colleagues are making use of digital tools like AccuRx. This makes it much easier for you to include photographic attachments with advice and referral requests.

For many specialties, particularly dermatology, adding a photograph improves the quality of an advice request or a referral, including for 2WW referrals.

Requests and referrals to dermatology should include a photograph and an appropriate referral form. This photograph should contain a clear image but can be taken by the patient themselves.

Routine advice should be sought for x-rays from 22 June onwards. Further updates on the availability of diagnostics will be provided in the coming days and weeks.

The NW London Outpatient Guidelines remain in use, and can be accessed through SystemOne, EMIS and directly in www.healthinorthwestlondon.nhs.uk.

Next Steps

We will make available a summary sheet showing how you access advice and guidance for all North West London provider trusts and services, this will be available on www.healthinorthwestlondon.nhs.uk.

The current advice and guidance service will be delivered through a range of platforms. We are working on a standardised platform for the provision of advice and guidance, and we will share updates on this as the work develops.

Trust advice and guidance process contacts

Should you need to support in using the advice and guidance services offered by the Trusts, please contact either the Trust GP liaison service or the contacts listed below.

Imperial	Damian.Bruty@nhs.net
Chelsea and Westminster	Sunil.Johal@chelwest.nhs.uk
London North West	Chris.Robbins@nhs.net
Hillingdon	Anjali.Joshi@nhs.net
Royal Brompton	m.wicking@rbht.nhs.uk

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