

Factsheet

Improving GP access to specialist advice and guidance to inform hospital referrals

What's the need?

Currently, GPs access specialist advice and guidance about potential hospital referrals primarily through a myriad of formal and informal email addresses and telephone numbers. These tend to be standalone channels, unconnected from core patient administration or referral systems and generally run in the absence of agreed and consistent processes or response times.

Our hospital teams also use a range of different processes to vet and triage referrals – depending on where and how a referral originates.

All of this can mean additional work and time wasted for GPs and hospital clinicians as well as delays for patients in getting access to the most appropriate care.

What's the solution?

As part of a wider programme of work to develop more joined up and consistent ways of working as we move to become an integrated care system, we want to improve the whole hospital referral process. This includes developing and digitising shared processes that connect with our existing digital systems and better meet user needs.

We want to begin this development by moving to a consistent digital approach to providing GPs with specialist advice and to provide hospital teams with a single view of all referrals.

To help us move quickly, we will be rolling out a digital platform - Rego - with referral management capability beyond that currently available with the NHS e-referral system - that is already being used effectively for some aspects of the referral process at Hillingdon Hospitals and London North West University Healthcare.

We will be able to integrate the system with the NHS e-referral system as well as our hospitals' clinical documentation system and practice record systems so that advice requests can be converted automatically into referrals where needed. Referrals will then appear in a separate Rego worklist, so they can be vetted and triaged within one platform.

How will it work?

If a GP needs specialist advice or guidance to help inform a hospital referral decision, they will initiate a request through the Rego platform, which will be installed on their PC. The platform will automatically attach key patient demographic information equivalent to

what is required within the standard hospital referral letter templates. Active, past medical history, along with medication, investigations (past 12 months) and family history is added. The GP can also attach any additional information they feel is relevant.

The request will be sent to the most appropriate worklist at the relevant Trust where a hospital specialist will review the information and decide on one of the following options:

- request further information
- provide advice and guidance to help the GP to support the patient directly
- refer the patient into the hospital service
- refer the patient on to a more relevant hospital service.

This is expected to happen within three working days of the request being submitted.

If a patient needs a hospital referral, the specialist will be able to progress it within the Rego system by sending the request directly to the hospital appointment booking team or, if the service offers a 'choose and book' option, there will be a facility for the patient to action the referral themselves.

GPs will still be able to make referrals directly via the NHS e-referral system where they are clear on the referral guidance, including all urgent referrals to cancer pathways.

How and when will the new approach be implemented?

We are aiming to roll out the full implementation at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital (Chelsea and Westminster and West Middlesex Hospitals) and Imperial College Healthcare (Charing Cross, Hammersmith, Queen Charlotte's and Chelsea, St Mary's and the Western Eye hospitals) as a phase 1 from early February. Once it is all working effectively, we will close the existing telephone and email advice services at these trusts and extend the fully integrated implementation to Hillingdon Hospitals and London North West University Healthcare as a phase 2.

What do I need to do?

In terms of the installation of Rego, please look out for a pop up in the bottom right hand corner of your computer screen which will prompt you to accept the installation process. If you have any problems, there is a dedicated technical support team to help – telephone: 0207 993 5870 or email support@vantage.health.

We will be running online briefing/Q&A sessions for GPs in the new year and will send you dates and details shortly.

For updates and more information please speak to your local primary care team. We will also be including updates in the North West London Clinical Commission Group primary care bulletin and at your local primary care forums.