

Open access follow-up (OAFU) for breast cancer

Information for GPs

Introduction

We are sending you this leaflet because one of your patients who has received treatment for breast cancer at Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust is now starting on the open access follow-up (OAFU) programme.

What is OAFU?

OAFU is a new type of aftercare service used at Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust for patients who have received primary treatment for breast cancer. Routine follow-up appointments are replaced with an arrangement that allows patients and their GPs to report any worries, concerns or symptoms of possible progressive disease via a dedicated helpline, with a response within 24 working hours if no-one is available to respond immediately. If we think that the patient needs to be seen, they will be offered an appointment within two weeks.

Why have you introduced OAFU?

OAFU provides a better service for patients. Many people find that routine follow-up appointments make them anxious and can take up a lot of time. Instead, the dedicated OAFU helpline gives patients and their GPs quick access to the breast services medical team who will organise hospital appointments as required. This type of follow-up service has been used successfully in many hospitals across the country for a number of years.

What information will my patient be given?

Your patient will have a consultation with a specialist breast nurse during which the OAFU service and helpline will be explained. The nurse will also cover the following topics:

- the patient's diagnosis and treatment
- their medication and possible side effects
- the arrangements for follow-up tests, such as annual mammograms and bone density scans, and the process for getting the results
- how to be body and breast aware
- related health, lifestyle and wellbeing advice
- sources of further help and support
- the signs and symptoms to look out for and report via the helpline that might indicate a return or spread of the disease

Will my patient still be able to access the breast service?

Patients and their GPs can access the breast service by telephoning or emailing the dedicated OAFU helpline if they have any aftercare-related concerns or questions.

OAFU telephone helpline: **020 3312 3426**

The telephone helpline is monitored between 09.00 and 17.00 from Monday to Friday. If no-one is available to answer immediately you can leave a message.

OAFU email address: **ICHC-tr.openaccessbreast@nhs.net**

Please note that, in order to maintain patient confidentiality, emails from GPs must be sent from nhs.net accounts and emails from patients will be responded to by telephone.

All telephone messages and emails will be responded to within 24 working hours. If we think that the patient should be seen in clinic or have any diagnostic tests, they will be offered an appointment within two weeks. You will be notified about any appointments when they are made.

What is expected of me?

It is unlikely that you will need to change the way that you care for your patients who have received treatment for breast cancer. The enclosed letter and treatment summary gives details of the medication that you will need to continue to prescribe and the duration, as well as any additional tests that you may need to arrange for them. Please keep this for your records. Your patient also has a copy of this information.

If your patient has any problems or if there is any proposed change in their medication, these will be discussed at the dedicated OAFU MDT. You will be informed in writing of any changes to their treatment or medication.

Will my patient continue to have routine mammograms?

Unless otherwise specified in the enclosed documents, we will continue to see your patient for annual mammograms for at least five years after their treatment or until they are eligible to join the NHS Breast Screening Programme. The mammograms will be arranged by the hospital and the results will be sent to you and your patient by post within two to three weeks of them having the test.

What about bone density scans?

Your patient will have been told if they need bone density scans and this is indicated in the enclosed letter and treatment summary. You will need to arrange these locally at the times indicated. It is expected that you will give the patient the results of these scans and act on any recommendations made.

Signs and symptoms to report

The following list is a reminder of the signs and symptoms to keep in mind when caring for patients who have had treatment for breast cancer. These symptoms could indicate a return or spread of the disease and the need for further investigation:

- a lump, thickening or swelling in the breast(s), in the area of a mastectomy, above the collar bone or in the neck, or under the arm
- any skin changes, red areas or raised spots on the breast or mastectomy scar
- nipple discharge
- a change in the shape or size of the breast(s)
- onset or recurrence of lymphoedema
- any new, ongoing pain in any part of the body, especially in the back or hips, that does not improve with painkillers and which is often worse at night
- pins and needles and/or a loss of sensation or weakness in the arms or legs
- unexplained weight loss and a loss of appetite
- a constant feeling of nausea
- discomfort or swelling under the ribs or across the upper abdomen
- a dry cough or a feeling of breathlessness
- severe headaches which are usually worse in the morning

If your patient experiences any of these symptoms, they should contact the OAFU helpline (see details above) without delay or you can do so on their behalf.

How can I find out more about OAFU?

If you would like more information about the OAFU service, please get in touch via the helpline.



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