

Open access follow-up (OAFU) for colorectal cancer

Information for GPs

Introduction

We are sending you this leaflet because one of your patients who has received treatment for colorectal 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 colorectal 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 the patient needs to be seen, they will be offered an appointment with the consultant and specialist team within two weeks.

Why has the Trust 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 colorectal cancer 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 colorectal nurse specialist during which the OAFU service and helpline will be explained. This specialist nurse will also cover with the patient:

- their diagnosis and treatment
- their medication and possible side effects
- the arrangements for follow-up tests, such as CT scans, blood tests and colonoscopies, and the process for getting the results
- what happens if any test results are abnormal - we will contact the patient and bring them to clinic within 14 days (you will also be notified of this in writing by the specialist nurse)
- details of the helpline the patient can contact if they have any symptoms, concerns or queries
- signs and symptoms to look out for and report via the helpline that might indicate a return or spread of the disease
- what happens if they have any worrying symptoms - we will make an appointment for them to be seen in clinic within 14 days (this will be communicated to you and the patient)
- related health, lifestyle and wellbeing advice

- sources of further help and support

Will my patient continue to have routine investigations?

Yes. The follow-up programme will involve:

- CEA blood monitoring every six months for five years
- CT imaging every six months for two years, then every year for a further three years
- a colonoscopy will be booked every three years (or within six months of surgery if it was not possible to do direct visualisation prior to surgery due to impassable tumour or emergency presentation)

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 colorectal cancer.

These symptoms *could* indicate a return or spread of the disease and the need for further investigation:

- any new bleeding from the patient's back passage, or from their stoma, or in their urine
- continuing pain that does not go away with their usual painkillers
- any unexplained lumps, bumps or swelling around their scar or stoma
- a change in bowel habit that lasts for six weeks or more – especially if they are waking in the night with loose stools
- unexplained weight loss, lack of appetite, a constant feeling of nausea or increase in waist measurement
- bleeding or discharge from the operation site
- any physical problem that interferes with their daily life, e.g. fatigue, difficulty in sleeping or any new problem with sexual function

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.

Please note your patient will have been told to contact you immediately or go straight to their local A&E department if their symptoms are particularly worrying, especially in the case of sudden, heavy bleeding or severe and persistent abdominal pain, and if they have concerning symptoms outside of office hours.

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 colorectal cancer. The enclosed end of treatment summary gives details of their treatment.

If your patient has any problems or if there is any proposed change in their medication, these will be communicated to you in writing, with a copy sent to the patient. If necessary, their condition will be discussed at our MDT and you will be informed, with a copy of the letter sent to the patient.

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

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

OAFU telephone helpline: **020 3312 5362**

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.openaccesscolorectal@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.

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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