

Cancer services

Open access follow-up (OAFU) for gynaecological cancer

Information for GPs

Introduction

We are sending you this leaflet because one of your patients who has received treatment for a gynaecological 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 a gynaecological 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 recurrent or progressive disease via a dedicated helpline with a response within 24 working hours. If, after telephone assessment, the patient needs to be seen, they will be offered an appointment with the consultant and specialist team 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 be time-consuming. Instead, the dedicated OAFU helpline gives patients and their GPs quick access to the gynaecological 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 gynaecological nurse specialist during which the OAFU service and helpline will be explained. The 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 the process for getting the results
- what happens if any test results are abnormal - we will contact the patient and review them in a clinic within 14 days (you will also be notified of this in writing by the specialist nurse)
- signs and symptoms to look out for that might indicate a return or spread of the disease

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- 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)
 - details of the helpline the patient can contact if they have any symptoms, concerns or queries
 - related health, lifestyle and wellbeing advice
 - sources of further help and support

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

Patients and their GPs can access the gynaecological 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, a message can be left.

OAFU email address: **ICHC-tr.openaccessgynaecological@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 a gynaecological 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 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 continue to have routine investigations?

Yes. The follow-up programme will involve them having Ca125 blood tests every three months for the first year, every six months for the next two years and then yearly for the next five years.

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 a gynaecological 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 vagina, back passage or in their urine
- persistent pain that does not go away with their usual painkillers
- any unexplained lumps, bumps or swelling around their abdomen
- a change in bowel and/or urinary habit that lasts for more than three to four weeks
- unexplained loss of weight, lack of appetite or a constant feeling of nausea
- discharge from the vagina
- 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 that they should 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.

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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