

Patients reluctant to attend hospital appointments

As local hospitals begin to increase the number of appointments that can now be offered face-to-face, it has been noted that significant numbers of patients are reluctant to attend hospital appointments at the present time. To try and allay concerns, local Trusts are providing information such as leaflets and video walkthroughs to patients on what to expect when they attend appointments, and what measures have been put in place to keep patients safe.

However, should patients decline all appointment offers, additional steps have now been agreed through the South East London Clinically Advisory Group, to minimise the risk of patients coming to harm.

Hospital clinicians will review all cases with patients who declined an appointment to ensure that they are fully informed in relation to any clinical consequences this may have.

- Where the patient's needs are deemed to be clinically urgent, the hospital clinician will contact the patient to discuss the risks and benefits of attending their hospital appointment. If following this conversation, the patient is still not willing to attend, the hospital clinician will write a letter to the patient's GP to let them know of the patient's decision, and to ask the GP to contact the patient to discuss further. The hospital clinician will also advise whether the patient has been kept on the hospital's waiting list for ongoing review, or if the patient is to be removed from the waiting list. If the decision is that the patient should be removed from the waiting list, this would then start an 8 week cooling off period. During this period, if the patient (following discussions with their primary care team) subsequently accepts a date, they would be accepted back on to the waiting list. Full details on how to contact the hospital team will be included in the letter.
- Where the patient's need are deemed not to be clinically urgent, following the clinical review the hospital clinician will write to the patient and GP to confirm the patient's decision, and advise them that the patient has been discharged back to the care of the GP. If, within 8 weeks of this decision being made, the patient feels ready to come into hospital, the GP or patient themselves, can

contact the relevant admissions team, and they will be reinstated on the waiting list. Full details on how to contact the hospital team will be included in the letter.

This approach has been agreed to support patients in making informed decisions over their treatment, whilst ensuring that there is clear communication and joint working between primary and secondary care.