

## **Joint Patient Access Policy**

### **Abbreviated Version**

#### **18 Weeks Referral to Treatment (RTT) Waiting times**

University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire (UHCW) NHS Trust is committed to providing timely access to services and treatment for all patients that are referred into hospital. The NHS Constitution gives patients the right to access services within maximum waiting times, or for the NHS to take all reasonable steps to offer you a range of suitable alternative providers if this is not possible. The Trust has developed a Patient Access Policy to ensure that you are aware of your rights and responsibilities when you are referred to UHCW NHS Trust. The maximum waiting times are described in the Handbook to the NHS Constitution.

#### **GP Responsibilities**

Your GP must establish whether you are fit and available to attend appointments and should inform you that you should be prepared to be seen and treated within 18 weeks (for routine, non-urgent conditions). Your GP will also discuss the choice of options available to you. Your GP should also explain to you that should you fail to keep appointments you may be discharged by the hospital back to the care of your GP if a clinician feels it is appropriate.

UHCW NHS Trust will always take particular care to ensure cancer patients, vulnerable adults and children are appropriately managed if they do not attend appointments.

#### **Your Responsibilities**

You may be referred by your GP, Dentist or other health professional by either the E-Referral Service (formerly Choose and Book) or a paper referral letter. If you have commitments or holidays booked that means you will not be available to be seen and treated within 18 weeks, please discuss with your GP who may decide to delay the referral until you are available.

You need to inform the hospital or GP if treatment and/or appointments are no longer required. You should attend agreed appointments and give sufficient notice in the event you need to change the agreed date or time.

## **What happens when the hospital receives my referral?**

Your 18 week waiting time begins from the date the hospital receives your referral letter into a consultant-led service. This is where a consultant will take overall clinical responsibility for the service, team or treatment. The referral will then be checked by a doctor to ensure you have been referred to the right doctor or service.

## **My 18-week “clock”**

The hospital uses a ‘clock’ to monitor your pathway from referral to treatment. The ‘clock’ starts when the hospital receives your referral and will continue to ‘tick’ until you have received treatment for the condition for which you have been referred. Treatment can include advice, prescriptions, physiotherapy or surgery and will also stop your clock if no treatment is required for your condition.

## **Are any services exempt from the 18 week waiting time?**

- Maternity Services
- Non-Consultant led services, i.e. nurse led clinics or physiotherapy
- Planned admissions
- Emergency services
- Diagnostics only (direct access)

## **How will the hospital make my appointment?**

Where possible you will be offered a choice of dates. Your GP may book your appointment through the E-referral Service. This service offers GPs direct access to hospital appointments. Some services may choose to send you a letter with an appointment date already made for you. If you need to change this appointment you may do so and it will not affect your 18 week waiting time. Alternatively, the hospital may send you a letter asking you to contact the hospital to make your appointment.

## **What if I need to cancel/rearrange my first new outpatient appointment?**

You may cancel/rearrange your new appointment twice and these cancellations will not change your 18 week waiting time. If you choose to cancel a third appointment, the clinician will decide whether it is appropriate to refer you back to your GP who will discuss your referral and treatment options with you.

## **What if the hospital cancels my appointment?**

UHCW NHS Trust is committed to reducing hospital cancellations and will take all reasonable steps to avoid cancelling your appointment. We will always try to explore every option available before we decide to cancel your appointment. If we do cancel your appointment, we will do our very best to get your next appointment booked within as close to the original date as possible. If the hospital cancels your appointment your 18 week clock is not affected and continues to 'tick'.

## **What happens if I do not attend my agreed appointment?**

Although the vast majority of patients attend all of their appointments, unfortunately, some patients do not which can cause delays for you and other patients as well as wasting valuable NHS appointments.

If you miss your first appointment and don't let us know in advance, the clinician will decide whether it is appropriate to refer you back to your GP. The GP may refer you back to us again if and when appropriate. If the consultant decides to offer you a further appointment your 18 Week clock will be set to zero from the date you are contacted and agree your next appointment.

The hospital will never routinely discharge children, vulnerable adults or cancer patients if they do not attend an appointment.

## **My first outpatient appointment**

When you attend your first appointment your consultant will discuss with you what the best treatment options are for your condition, the most common of these are:

- The consultant informs you that you do not require hospital treatment for your symptoms at this time and will refer you back to your GP – your 18 week clock stops
- The consultant refers you for some diagnostic tests – your 18 week clock will continue
- The consultant/specialist nurse carries out a treatment in the clinic – your 18 week clock stops
- If your condition does not require treatment or surgery but you are given a prescription or advice for your condition – your 18 week clock stops
- If your condition requires surgery, your 18 week clock will start or continue when the consultant adds you to their surgical waiting list – your 18 week clock will stop on the day you are admitted for surgery.

There are times where it may not be appropriate for you to receive treatment within 18 weeks. This may be because as a patient:

- you need several tests completed in sequence
- you may not be medically fit enough to receive treatment within 18 weeks
- you choose to wait longer than 18 weeks
- your clinician may need to monitor your condition before they can make a decision on the most appropriate treatment

It may sometimes be more clinically appropriate to monitor your condition rather than actively treating you. In this case your 18 week clock will stop. The clinician may decide in the future to offer you treatment for your condition and a new 18 week clock would start from the day the new decision to treat was made.

When you are presented with the treatment options you may also request time to consider the options or discuss the treatment plan with your family. You should discuss with your consultant the length of time you require to consider your treatment options and the clinician will advise you whether it is clinically safe to do so. Depending on the length of time that you require, this would be considered a patient initiated period of active monitoring and would stop your 18 week clock. A new 18 week clock will start when you inform us you are happy to have the suggested treatment.

### **Diagnostic tests/treatments**

When you are referred for a diagnostic test or treatment, you should wait no longer than six weeks for your appointment. You will either be given a follow-up appointment with your consultant as soon as you know the date of your test or you will be asked to telephone the department to make an appointment as soon as you are given the date for your test.

Some consultants may decide to check the result of the test before you attend and may decide not to offer you a further appointment as you will not require treatment. In this case the consultant will inform you and your GP of the result of your test and the reason for your discharge.

### **My follow-up appointments**

Please attend your follow-up appointments as the clinician will have your test results available and will be able to discuss the results of your tests and the plans for your treatment. If your symptoms improve and you do not feel you need to attend your follow up appointment, please inform the hospital so that your appointment is not

wasted. The hospital will then close this treatment episode for you so that your records are kept up-to-date.

### **My pre-assessment appointment**

Some patients that are added to a waiting list for surgery will be offered a pre assessment appointment. This appointment is to check that you are suitably fit for the surgery you are about to have. When you attend this appointment the nurse will decide if you are fit for surgery.

- If you are declared as 'fit,' the scheduling team will be informed and they will contact you to agree your surgery date and your 18 week clock continues to 'tick'.
- If you are declared as 'unfit,' for example you may have a viral illness from which you will recover in a couple of weeks, you will be listed for surgery and your 18 week clock will continue to tick.
- If a more serious condition is discovered which will need treatment prior to surgery going ahead, you may be removed from the waiting list, monitored for your original condition and reviewed in clinic until you are fit and available for surgery. Or your condition may require you to be discharged back to your GP who will inform your consultant when you have been declared as fit for surgery. You will then be added back to the waiting list. Your 18 week clock will stop and will start again when you are added back to the waiting list.

### **Offering an admission date**

If you do require surgery, we will make you "reasonable offers" for your admission date. By reasonable we mean that the first offer date will give more than three weeks' notice and offer two different dates.

Patients who have been given treatment options but choose to delay their operation may potentially be putting themselves at risk of harm or compromising the outcome of their treatment. If you choose to delay your treatment for an extended period of time then your notes will be reviewed to ensure it is clinically appropriate to do so. The clinician may also decide that it is more appropriate to discharge you back to your GP until you are ready for treatment.

### **Attending my admission for surgery**

You must ensure you have followed all of the instructions given to you prior to your surgery. These could include fasting instructions, where to attend, time of attendance and transport arrangements. The hospital will make every effort not to cancel dates

for surgery but on occasion we may have to. You will be kept fully informed as to the reason for the cancellation and the date when you are likely to have your surgery rebooked. If you are cancelled either before your surgery date or on the date of surgery, your 18 week clock will continue to tick.

If the hospital cancels your surgery on the day you are due to have your surgery due to non-clinical reasons (e.g. consultant called away due to emergency), the hospital will make every effort to offer you a surgery date within 28 days of your cancelled date.

If you do not attend your date for surgery and have not informed the hospital it is likely you will be discharged back to your GP. The consultant will decide whether you should be given another date for surgery. Your 18 week clock will stop when you receive your treatment or if you are discharged.

### **What happens if I feel that I have waited too long?**

If you feel that your treatment has not started within 18 weeks since you were referred or that you feel there is a risk that you will not be treated within 18 weeks, then please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) office, who will direct you to the responsible manager.

Our PALS office will be able to address issues at University Hospital in Coventry and the Hospital of St Cross in Rugby.

Telephone

- 0800 028 4203 (FREEPHONE)

Email: [feedback@uhcw.nhs.uk](mailto:feedback@uhcw.nhs.uk)

Post: PALS, University Hospital, Clifford Bridge Road, Coventry. CV2 2DX

What we will do:

- We will check how long you have been waiting and what is planned to happen to you next.
- We will confirm to you if it is or is not possible to treat you within 18 weeks.

### **If it is not possible to treat me within 18 weeks**

We can offer you the choice of staying under the care of your current consultant and wait longer than 18 weeks for the start of treatment (Note: this will be recorded as a

failure on our part). We will investigate and, if available, we will offer you a clinically appropriate alternative provider who would be able to treat you sooner.

As a patient you have a responsibility to attend all appointment dates you have accepted. If you have cancelled or did not attend appointments, you will wait longer for treatment of your condition. If you do not attend appointments you risk waiting longer than 18 weeks for treatment for your condition and you will not be offered treatment with alternative providers.

### **Independent sector (private healthcare providers)**

UHCW NHS Trust may from time-to-time, use the independent sector to ensure that patients are seen within their waiting times. Not all patients will be suitable for treatment in the independent sector and those that are selected must meet strict guidelines to ensure it is clinically appropriate to do so. If you are offered treatment in the independent sector and decide that you would prefer to continue to wait for treatment at UHCW NHS Trust, you will be advised how long you may have to wait for treatment. Patients that are sent to the independent sector for treatment will have their treatment funded by UHCW NHS Trust.

### **Top tips:**

- Talk to your GP about what to expect from your referral to the hospital
- If your treatment is routine please ensure you will be available for the next 18 weeks
- If you are unavailable to attend appointments or have other commitments, you and your GP may decide to delay your referral until you are available
- Tell us if you change your address or telephone number
- Keep your appointments and arrive on time
- Let us know in plenty of time if you are unable to attend an appointment
- Write your questions down before you attend so that you don't forget to ask
- Let us know if you think that you have been waiting too long

If you think you are waiting too long for an appointment, please contact the telephone number on the top of the letter you received. If you are still not satisfied contact our PALS office on the above telephone number.

A full copy of our Patient Access Policy can be found on our website [www.uhcw.nhs.uk](http://www.uhcw.nhs.uk) or can be made available to you upon request from our PALS department.