

Buxton Medical Practice Patient Participation Group

Patient choice – how the referral system works

We're aware of the staff in reception at Buxton Medical Practice but behind the scenes there is an Admin team of six and Jo, the Medical Secretary. Jo has been kind enough to explain how the system for referring us to specialist services works.

Jo normally works 24 hours a week in a small office on the first floor. In the corner is a fax machine. It's a reminder of when the doctors dictated requests for referrals onto tapes. The referral letters were then typed up by the medical secretaries and faxed or posted to the relevant hospitals.

Paper referrals have now been completely phased out. Instead of dictating the request, the doctor goes into the patient's record on the computer and selects the type of referral (e.g. Cardiology) to open a form. The patient's details are added automatically, and the doctor completes the request by checking boxes and typing in any additional information required.

The next step is to select the care provider (usually a hospital) to send the referral to. The doctor can do this during the consultation, but usually the referral form is transferred to the task list on Jo's computer.

The timing of the referral can be routine, urgent or (for certain conditions) 'two week wait'. Jo uses the NHS e-Referral system (e-Ref) to get a list of the providers that accept referrals of the right type and timing. Whether nearby providers will accept a patient with a Buxton postcode changes over time. For example, at the moment Macclesfield are not taking cardiology referrals from Buxton and Stepping Hill is not accepting dermatology patients.

Once e-Ref has generated the list of providers, Jo checks that they will treat patients with the specific condition for which the patient is being referred. Then she looks at the waiting times and how far the patient will have to travel..

For some referrals, private hospitals like the Spire Regency in Macclesfield or Clarendon in Sheffield will come up in the list with relatively short waiting times. But private hospitals may reject patients with conditions like obesity, diabetes or cardiovascular disease because they don't have the facilities to manage complications that are more likely to occur in people with these comorbidities.

Jo's knowledge and experience means she can often rule out providers that will reject the patient before drawing up a shortlist of the providers with the best waiting times and locations for the patient to choose from. If available, five providers will be listed.

When the shortlist is complete, Jo uses the e-Ref system to print the booking instructions which are posted to the patient. The letter shows the providers the patient can choose from and explains how to log into the e-Ref system and book an appointment. If patients have downloaded the NHS App, Jo can also use e-Ref to send the information in an e-mail, and they can book the appointment using the app.

(continued overleaf)



Once e-Ref shows the patient has made a booking, the completed referral form is sent to the chosen provider. If the provider can't accept the referral, they respond via e-Ref, usually suggesting an alternative provider. But in most cases the booking is accepted, and the provider will communicate directly with the patient to arrange the appointment.

It's important to note that BMP gets no information from providers until they have seen the patient, so Jo can't answer queries about appointments. If she needs to find out what is happening, she has to call the same number as the patients.

In a typical week, Jo will process 60 to 80 new referrals of which about 10 will be urgent. Rachel from the Admin team covers for Jo on Fridays and when she is on leave. Urgent referrals are prioritized but they are all processed as quickly as possible. As with any big change, there were concerns about moving from paper to electronic referrals. But the e-Ref system now seems to be working well, and sending referrals electronically is clearly more secure and quicker faxing or posting them.

For quicker referrals



You'll need:

- an e-mail address and a mobile phone or landline number
- your NHS number, date of birth and postcode
- proof of your identity e.g. passport or UK driving licence

Think Pharmacy First – you may be able to avoid waiting to see a GP

You don't need an appointment to see a pharmacist and they can provide advice for many conditions, see <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/pharmacies/how-pharmacies-can-help/> The NHS Pharmacy First scheme enables community pharmacists (like Nafees at Buxton Pharmacy) to prescribe prescription-only drugs for patients with the conditions listed below. The prescribed medication will be free if you don't normally pay for prescriptions or charged at the usual NHS prescription rate.



Pharmacy First conditions:

- Earache (aged 1 to 17 years)
- Impetigo (aged 1 year and over)
- Infected insect bites (aged 1 year and over)
- Shingles (aged 18 years and over)
- Sinusitis (aged 12 years and over)
- Sore throat (aged 5 years and over)
- Urinary tract infections (UTIs in women aged 16 to 64 years)

Stop Press!

The Patient Participation has just set up a website <https://bmpfriends.co.uk/> If you have any comments, or suggestions for the content, please e-mail them to enquiries@bmpfriends.co.uk