**PRIVATE REFERRAL ADVICE**

**WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU ARE REFERRED BY YOUR GP TO SEE A** **CONSULTANT PRIVATELY?**

With the pressures on NHS waiting lists more patients are trying to speed up their care by seeing specialists in the private sector. This leaflet describes what you can expect to happen if you ask your GP in Rathfriland Health Centre to refer you to see a Consultant privately.

**WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?**

You should contact the Consultant’s team or Private Hospital directly to organise your own appointment. If you have private health insurance, your insurer may have a list of approved specialists. You may want to check with your insurer before you proceed. The specialist will almost always request information from your GP – so please contact your GP surgery to ask them to write a referral letter for the Consultant (or specialty if no name known). This letter will include any relevant medical details about you. If an insurance company wishes for a specific form to be completed to justify the referral, then your GP will have to charge a fee for providing this additional report.

**SEEING THE CONSULTANT:**

**WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU NEED A TEST OR PROCEDURE?**

If the Consultant thinks that you need any tests (including blood tests), or a surgical procedure, the Consultant is responsible for:

* **arranging the test and any medications (such as sedation) that might be needed for this**. They should also explain how and when you will receive a date of any procedure and what to do if the date is not suitable for you.
* **giving you the results and explaining what they mean** (this may be done in a separate appointment with the Consultant or by letter). You should not visit or ring your GP surgery to discuss the results of tests organised by others - it is the Consultant’s responsibility to discuss this with you.

Please note that any tests required **should be carried out privately**. This may mean you need to travel to where you saw your Consultant. The cost of these tests should be paid for within the private sector, which will increase the total costs you incur unless covered by your insurance. GP practices **cannot** perform blood tests or other private investigations using NHS resources. Doing so would inappropriately use NHS resources to carry out private activity.

If a private Consultant informs you to arrange or to expect to hear from your NHS GP to arrange such tests, then this is incorrect. You should, at the time, remind the consultant that all tests need to be carried out privately. Avoiding inappropriate requests for your NHS GP to carry out tests will:

* Avoid delay in having your tests
* Ensure that the right person (your Consultant) gets the results directly
* Avoid delays in your Consultant reviewing your results and planning and required follow up

**WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU NEED NEW MEDICINES?**

The Consultant might suggest prescribing new medicines for you or might want to make changes to the medicines that you are already taking. The Consultant is responsible for giving you either the first prescription for any new medicine or a written advice slip to bring to your GP. Your GP can only begin prescribing this medication if there is sufficient explanation on the written advice slip and the medication falls under the normal prescribing rules of the NHS. It will take at least 3 working days from receipt of this advice slip before a prescription is issued, and longer if further safety checks are needed. Private consultants may suggest medications to you that require frequent monitoring and reviews while on treatment (eg Amber list drugs). If you are told that this is the case you will need to arrange regular follow up with your consultant privately in order to be safely prescribed these medications by your NHS GP. Your GP cannot prescribe these specialist medications unless your private consultant fulfills their responsibility under defined 'Shared Care Guidelines' which clearly document how often you should be seen by them and what should happen during each visit.

Occasionally private consultants suggest medications which are not normally prescribed by NHS GPs at all. In these circumstances your GP will refuse to prescribe and you must have the medications prescribed by your private consultant who will take full responsibility for the monitoring.

**WHAT HAPPENS IF I NEED TO TRANSFER MY CARE BACK TO THE NHS?**

If after seeing the Consultant privately you want to be back under NHS care, regulations allow for you to transfer back. You should be transferred back into the NHS system where you would have been at the point you left the private sector (eg you do not go back to the start of the queue). This transfer must be done by the private Consultant who is overseeing your care and you should not be passed back to the GP for this to be done. There are a few reasons why:

* it delays your ongoing care
* your Consultant knows the full details of your condition and where best to refer you to
* it wastes precious NHS appointments with your GP and adds unnecessary administration to the process

The consultant should arrange for you to be seen in the appropriate NHS clinic by writing a referral letter to this clinic.

**WHAT IF I NEED A FOLLOW-UP APPOINTMENT?**

The Consultant will discuss with you whether you should attend hospital for ongoing follow-up care or whether you should be discharged back to your GP. If the Consultant thinks you do need to be seen again, he will give you another appointment or tell you when to make one in future. If you do not hear anything, please contact the Consultant’s office, rather than your GP surgery.

**WHAT DO I DO IF I HAVE ANY QUESTIONS?**

If you have any specific questions related to your care, you should contact the Consultant’s team directly. It is important that you make sure you know how you can contact your Consultant’s secretary.

**WHAT IF I JUST WANT TO ARRANGE A SCAN PRIVATELY?**

In some cases patients wish to arrange scans (such as an MRI scan of spine in cases of back pain) directly in the private sector. Often your GP has no expertise in interpreting the results of complex scans and will normally ask that you see a consultant in that area who can decide if a scan is needed and provide the appropriate interpretation of the results.