**Referrals for hospital treatment – Information for patients**

*A message from Dr Graham Syers, Clinical Chair Northumberland Clinical Commissioning Group explaining what you can expect if you require a referral to hospital in the coming weeks.*

It is quite common for a patient to contact their GP surgery to discuss the possibility of a referral for investigation or treatment to a hospital.

During the pandemic we have always had the capability to refer to hospital for those people requiring urgent treatment of those people with symptoms suggestive of cancer.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic some routine hospital investigations and referral processes have been suspended.

Your local health services are now at a stage to consider how some of these services could be reinstated and this will occur in the coming weeks.

How these services are now provided will depend on a number of factors such as;

* The type of problem being considered
* The type of investigations which may be required
* Ongoing factors relating to coronavirus such as the availability of protective equipment or the ability to ensure social distancing measures

Before a final decision is made to refer somebody to hospital a GP or nurse practitioner will often explore a number of options such as;

* Discussing your case with the colleagues and considering who may be best placed to help you within their own general practice team.
* Considering if an intermediate service such as physiotherapy or musculoskeletal service is more appropriate
* Making reference to local guidelines which have been developed with hospital colleagues to ensure that all treatment possibilities have being explored and investigations considered to be necessary have been undertaken.
* Making use of an advice and guidance system which enables GPs to obtain timely advice from a hospital consultant which is usually available within a week.

If a referral is made to hospital the referral will be screened by a receiving consultant. In some circumstances further advice may be issued or it may be considered appropriate to assess the patient by telephone or with a video call in certain circumstances rather than a face to face out-patient appointment.

At present the hospital is considering how to ensure the risk to patients and staff is minimised with regard to coronavirus infection. This may entail: screening questions with regard to symptoms, testing for coronavirus or periods of self- isolation for you and your household members prior to any surgery being considered.

The capacity of hospitals to assess and treat people may well be reduced for the foreseeable future and therefore for non-urgent problems waiting times will be longer than usual.

If you have any concerns about your health please do not hesitate to use NHS 111, online or on the telephone, or contact your GP surgery by telephone to discuss it with them.

Take care and stay safe,

Graham