

Referral Treatment Times (RTT) - Patient perspective

**What is it?
What do I need to know?**

What is meant by waiting times?

The aim of the NHS in Wales is for you to wait the shortest time possible in line with your assessed clinical need.

The main waiting time targets are:

- 95% of patients to start treatment within 26 weeks of receipt of referral
- 100% of patients to start treatment within 36 weeks of receipt of referral

These are known as Referral to Treatment (RTT) targets.

What is meant by a referral?

A referral is when your GP, Dentist, Ophthalmologist or other Health Care Professional (HCP) staff refers you to a hospital for specialist treatment. The clinician will discuss with you the referral process and if required, provide you with an information leaflet. As part of this discussion, you will be advised of the reason for the referral, your potential treatment options and what is expected of you along the referral to treatment pathway.

The clinician will send your details to the appropriate specialty in secondary care for your clinical need. This will enable secondary care to assess, in accordance with agreed guidelines, what is required for your treatment pathway.

The clinician can only refer you to a named consultant/medical professional where:

- the consultant/medical professional is the only individual with the recognised skills to deal with your clinical need or;
you have recently been under the consultant/medical professional for the same or similar condition.

What happens to your referral?

When you are referred, you are giving your consent to be contacted to attend a medical review and/or medical test which will start your pathway in hospital services.

The medical professional who receives and reviews your referral will make a clinical judgement on your priority to be seen. They will inform the appointment booking service of this decision and agree when you should be booked for your appointment.

The hospital will notify you and your GP practice or other Health Care Professional (HCP) that your referral has been accepted and the approximate waiting time for the specialty that you have been referred into. This should help you know how long you will have to wait for your initial appointment.

The acceptance letter will also outline the process for agreeing your appointment. You will be actively involved in booking your appointment and once agreed, you must make every effort to attend.

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What is my role in the referral process?

You need to ensure that your GP/Dentist/Ophthalmologist (or HCP) and hospital have your correct contact details. This includes providing details of your home and mobile telephone number as many health boards may want to book your appointments by phone and offer a reminder system. If you do not wish to be contacted by phone, please inform your GP/Dentist/ Ophthalmologist (or HCP) and hospital.

It is also important that all relevant personal details are up to date to ensure that your individual needs are met. For example any specific communication requirements or if you are ex-military personnel (some conditions are prioritised for ex-military personnel).

As part of the referral, your GP or hospital may ask you for some additional information to ensure you are seen by the most appropriate person in the quickest time.

All of your personal and contact details will be held safely and in accordance with confidentiality procedures.

What is the role of the hospital in managing my referral?

The role of the hospital is to offer you an appointment within the clinical timelines requested by your consultant and within the national waiting times.

While every effort will be made to make your appointment at a hospital as close to your home as possible (depending on the specialty and the waiting time), the earliest appointment may be at another hospital site.

You will be offered an appointment that is the best fit for your requirements. At the time of the offer, you will have the opportunity to change the appointment if it is not suitable.

What is my role in booking a hospital appointment?

How your appointment will be booked will be outlined in the acceptance letter. Your full participation in the agreed process will be required otherwise your waiting time may be affected.

Due to the demand for appointments across various specialties, the choice of dates and times for certain specialties may be limited. Although every effort will be made to agree a suitable date, you will be required to be flexible in your approach to agreeing to an appointment as some clinics are only held on particular days.

Once you have agreed your appointment, it is important that you keep to your agreed appointment dates. Any subsequent changes made by yourself could result in a longer wait and, if you make more than two changes along your pathway, you could be

returned to the care of your GP/Dentist/Ophthalmologist (or HCP) and your waiting time will be stopped.

What happens if I can't attend my appointment?

There will be times when it may not be possible for you to attend the agreed date or time. If this is the case, you need to inform the hospital as soon as you know and arrange a new date. You will remain on the waiting list, but your waiting time will be reset to reflect the time lost. This adjustment will be explained to you at the time of your re-booking.

It is important that you try and keep your agreed appointment dates. If you require more than two changes along your pathway, your referral may be sent back to your referrer and your waiting time will be stopped.

Patients who do not turn up for their appointment and have not notified the organisation in advance are identified as Did Not Attend (DNA). If you do not attend without prior notification, and depending upon whether your consultant/medical professional feels that your care will be clinically affected, you may be referred back to your GP/Dentist/Ophthalmologist or other HCP and your pathway will stop. If the clinician still wishes to see you, your waiting time will be reset to the date of your DNA appointment.

As part of your interaction with your clinical team, you will be informed of the next expected step and any potential options. Any decision which affects the clinical management of your care which is made when you are not present will be documented and shared with you and your GP or other HCP.

What happens if the hospital cancels my appointment?

Any appointment that is cancelled by the hospital will result in another appointment being made as quickly as possible. Your waiting time will not be adjusted for this appointment and the clock will continue to count. The hospital will make every effort to meet the clinical and national targets for your needs.

What is my role while waiting for my appointment?

If you have any questions about your referral or waiting time, contact details should be available in the communication issued by your hospital (letter, text, and phone) or in the information leaflets provided by the referring clinician or hospital. Additional information can also be sourced from the health board's website.

If you have not heard from the hospital within the expected timeframe, you can phone the hospital to ask for an update about your length of wait.

While you are waiting for your appointment you are encouraged to follow the advice of your GP at all times. You should try to keep yourself well and comply with any medication that you have been prescribed. You may find it useful to join a local support group or seek advice on what you may do while you wait. Your GP should have information on what is available within your local area.

If you feel that you no longer want to be referred, you must let your GP and hospital know so that your treatment pathway can be stopped. This will enable valuable NHS resources to be utilised for other patients who require clinical care.

What is my role when I am on my treatment pathway?

In conjunction with your health professional (doctor, dentist, nurse or therapist) you should take an active role in the discussions and decisions that are made at each stage of your pathway. You need to ensure that you clearly understand the next stage of your pathway so that you can monitor its progress.

When you have chosen your treatment option (whether that be a procedure or an operation) it is important that you keep yourself fit for the treatment.

How is the waiting time calculated?

The waiting time target commences from the receipt of your referral into secondary care and usually ends at the start of any required treatment for your clinical need. In some cases, starting treatment may only be the first stage of a longer pathway.

When your referral letter is received at the hospital your waiting time begins (this is sometimes known as the start of your waiting time clock). For some specialties (such as orthopaedics), services have been established in the community meaning that your referral may be seen by this service rather than by the hospital. Your GP will inform you where your referral has been sent to.

The waiting time clock can be stopped for various reasons and you will be actively involved in this process. The usual stop point is when the treatment for your condition has commenced (for some this will mean the beginning of a course of treatment whilst for others it will end with this particular course of care). For some pathways, involvement in a clinical trial may be offered by your clinician or you may be sent for tests and therapies that are deemed to be treatment options. With all pathways, your clinician will fully explain your options.

The waiting time clock can be adjusted if you become ill with another condition which affects your fitness for treatment. If the illness is a prolonged condition (i.e. you are unfit for more than three weeks) you will be taken off the waiting list. Both you and your GP will be informed by letter of the reasons for this removal and you will be provided with guidelines outlining how you can return to the waiting list at a later date.

Due to their specialist nature, some treatment pathways are not be included in the 26 week target. In this instance, the principle of waiting the shortest time possible is still applied.

What if I need transport?

If you have problems organising a planned journey to or from a healthcare appointment or inpatient stay you should contact the following help lines to see if you are eligible for free transport. Eligibility is based upon medical criteria, which has been agreed nationally by the Welsh Assembly Government. If you do qualify, staff will book the transport for you.

If you do not meet the criteria, you will be offered alternative contact numbers for organisations that may be able to provide transport for you.

Help lines

- Patients registered with Carmarthenshire or Pembrokeshire GP Practices please contact
0300 123 2303
- Patients registered with Ceredigion GP Practices please contact
0845 840 1234

This information has been extracted from the HDUHB Patient Access - Elective Care policy.

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