

Rapid Specialist Opinion (RSO)

As from the 17th October 2016 a new Rapid Specialist Opinion (RSO) service is being introduced in North Durham CCG.

Patients are our primary concern. The aim of this service is to ensure patients are receiving the most appropriate treatment for their condition in the most appropriate place.

It is North Durham CCG's responsibility to make efficient use of resources. GPs have responsibility to make best use of NHS resources and need up to date evidence and advice to be able to treat patients in practice or refer on appropriately. Unnecessary outpatient appointments are a large cost to the NHS. RSO is being put in place to make sure practices follow clinical guidelines which have been agreed locally with GPs, hospital consultants and many other relevant practitioners. All GPs within North Durham CCG are expected to use the scheme which has been implemented with the support of GPs. RSO will improve referral quality and ensure that all referrals follow the most recent clinical guidelines. This will ensure that patients are treated in the most appropriate way, first time.

An example of this: A teenager waited for a dermatology appointment for 8 weeks for acne. The patient's GP hadn't tried any first line treatment. With the new RSO system, the outpatient appointment would be saved and the patient would have received treatment 8 weeks earlier.

Referral letters will be looked at by Consultants and specialist GPs and reviewed in the light of agreed clinical evidence and expertise. Hospital outpatient appointments should usually only be made when available practice and community based solutions have been tried. The scheme has been introduced following the success of a similar scheme which has been running by North Tyneside CCG for a year.

RSO is an administrative process change rather than a service change so there was no requirement for us to consult with the public. Nevertheless, the CCG and practices are continuing to speak to our patient representatives. The patient leaflet and frequently ask questions which are available on the North Durham CCG website, <http://www.northdurhamccg.nhs.uk/key-documents/patient-information/> , have been developed and amended following consultation with practice patient reference groups.

Patients continue to be offered choice during their discussion their GP. There should be no adverse impact on the patients experience or care they receive. RSO only covers referrals for a specified range of specialties (Dermatology, Ophthalmology, ENT, Gastroenterology, Cardiology and Gynaecology) it does not cover all referrals, very urgent and Cancer Two Week Wait referrals are specifically excluded from the scheme. The RSO process should take a maximum of 3 working days. Referrals for a secondary care which are not felt to be the most appropriate option are returned via the e-referral system to the GP along with suggestions for an alternative pathway or treatment. When a clinical decision is made at triage the responsibility sits with the organisation providing the service and they have appropriate clinical negligence cover for this.

The cost of the contract is £10 per referral letter considered by the specialist opinion service. The approximate cost of an unnecessary outpatient appointment varies depending on the specialty but is typically around £150.