

Changing your NHS hospital doctor or asking for a second opinion

Information for patients

This sheet explains what to do if you feel you want to change your consultant or ask for a second opinion about your condition or treatment.

The General Medical Council, which regulates doctors, states that all doctors must 'respect the patient's right to seek a second opinion'.

The Department of Health and Social Care accepts that if a doctor thinks that it is in the best interest of a patient to refer them for a second opinion they should do so.

Although you do not have a legal right to a second opinion, a healthcare professional will rarely refuse to refer you for one.

Do you need a second opinion?

Before asking for a second opinion, it is worth asking your consultant to go over your diagnosis and explain anything that you don't understand.

If you are unhappy with your diagnosis, or would like to consider a different course of treatment, discuss this with your consultant who will be happy to explain things. In many cases there may be no need for a second opinion.

How do I get a second opinion?

If you would still like a second opinion after speaking with the consultant, you will usually need to go back to your GP to ask them to refer you again. If your GP agrees to refer you to a new consultant, they will be told that this is for a second opinion. They will also be sent any relevant test results or X-rays previously carried out.

This does not mean that the new consultant will automatically take over your care. If you want to be treated by the new consultant, this needs to be arranged with them and their hospital.

Things to consider when asking for a second opinion:

- People who are referred for a second opinion are treated as a new patient referral and are assessed accordingly.
- A second opinion with a different consultant team may be at a different hospital which may involve additional travelling.

- The opinion of the second consultant may be the same as the first.
- While waiting for your second opinion, you may wish to inform your initial consultant team about this.
- If you have a serious medical condition requiring urgent treatment, we advise that you discuss this with your consultant and ask whether any delay in starting treatment could affect your wellbeing.

More information

If you have any questions about your care and treatment at the Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust, please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). Contact details for the Royal Free London PALS teams can be found on our website:

www.royalfree.nhs.uk/contact-us/patient-advice-and-liaison-service-pals

With thanks to the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust for allowing us to reproduce their leaflet.

Your feedback

If you have any feedback on this leaflet or for a list of references for it, please email:

rf.communications@nhs.net

Alternative formats

This leaflet is also available in large print. If you need this leaflet in another format – for example Braille, a language other than English or audio – please speak to a member of staff.

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