Teledermatology service

Information for patients

This leaflet answers common questions about the teledermatology service. If you would like further information, or have any particular worries, please do not hesitate to speak to your nurse or doctor.

What is teledermatology?
Teledermatology is the use of a special high quality camera to take photographs of your skin problem. Your photographs will be reviewed by a consultant dermatologist (a doctor specialising in the study and treatment of skin conditions) and they will decide if you need to be seen at a clinic in either the community or at one of our hospitals.

Who can be referred?
Patients in Barnet and Enfield who have been seen by their GP following concerns about a skin problem, and who are considered suitable for the service, can be referred to the teledermatology service.

What are the benefits of this service?

- You may come to find out the cause of your skin concern sooner than if you were to wait for a hospital clinic appointment.
- You will be directed to the correct clinic for a follow-up appointment, avoiding potential delays in your care.

How do I get a teledermatology appointment?
Your GP will make an assessment of your skin problem and ensure you are suitable for the service – if you are, your GP will refer you to the service.

You will receive a letter giving details of how to make your teledermatology appointment which will allow you to choose a time and location that is suitable for you. A confirmation letter will be automatically generated and sent to you once you have made your choice.

What happens at my appointment?
After booking in at reception you will meet with a medical photographer. They will explain what they are going to do, which includes obtaining your consent and taking the relevant photographs of your skin. The medical photographer
will also ask you about the impact of your condition on your quality of life; this will enable our doctors to understand better how much your skin condition affects your life.

The photographs and any other documentation will be transferred electronically to a consultant dermatologist, along with the referral letter from your GP and your consent form. This is done through a secure IT network. If you wish, you can bring a friend or relative with you to your appointment.

**What happens after my appointment?**

The doctor will carefully review your photographs and assess whether you need to be seen again or not. They will be able to decide on the best course of action, in the same way as if you had been seen in the hospital clinic.

For some patients, the doctor will be able to diagnose your problem, provide reassurance and discharge you back to your GP with a treatment plan for looking after your condition.

Sometimes, the consultant may decide that you do need to be seen in person or that you need a biopsy (a small piece of skin is taken and sent to a laboratory for diagnosis). If this is the case, you will be contacted and offered an appointment. If you need to be seen quickly, the doctor will arrange for this to take place and you will be contacted with further information. Currently, the available hospital sites for a biopsy following a teledermatology consultation are Barnet Hospital or Chase Farm Hospital only.

The doctor who reviews your photographs will write to you and your GP with the management plan so you are always kept up to date with what is happening with your care. In some cases, the consultant will issue an electronic prescription which will be available for you to collect either from Barnet Hospital or Chase Farm Hospital. This will usually be within ten days of seeing the medical photographer.

**Who provides the service?**

This service is delivered by the Royal Free London dermatology department who have been providing dermatology services to Barnet and Enfield patients for many years.
Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

Q. Does the consultant dermatologist have to see my skin problem in person in order to identify what is wrong?

A. No. The photographs are high quality and taken by professional photographers. However, if the consultant has any uncertainty about the diagnosis, they will ask to see you in a face-to-face consultation.

Q. Do I need to do anything after my appointment?

A. You will receive a copy of the consultant’s letter, which will explain what action, if any, you need to take next. The actions may include:
   a) If you need to be seen face-to-face, we will contact you to offer you an appointment.
   b) It may be that you don’t need to be seen in hospital, but will be managed by your GP. If this is the case it will be clearly written in the letter. It is very important that if the letter says this, you call your GP practice and make the appointment so that your treatment, if any, can be started.
   c) It could be that there is no further action needed and in which case you only need to go back and see your GP if you are worried about it.
   d) In some cases, the consultant will issue an electronic prescription which will be available for you to collect from Barnet Hospital or Chase Farm Hospital.

Q. Is this a safe service?

A. Yes, this service is safe. It is already provided in many areas of the country and is an excellent way of helping patients be seen more quickly than at present without losing any quality in the care received.

Useful contacts
Contact the dermatology team by:
   • Email: rf-tr.royalfreedermatologypatientqueries@nhs.net
   • Telephone: 020 7830 2351
More information
For more information about the Royal Free London teledermatology service visit our website: www.royalfree.nhs.uk/telederm

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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