

# Key Facts: A Patient's Waiting List Communication Journey

	Stage Description	Expected/Good Practice	Current Practice
<b>Visit to Referrer</b> (typically a GP)	It is identified that a patient requires assessment/review by a specialty within a Trust. A referral is sent.	Referrer/ GP provides patient with up to date general wait times for specialty	Majority of GPs feel unable to provide relevant up to date waiting times due to lack of information provided to them by the Trusts
<b>Trust receives referral</b>	Referral is received and triaged by a Trust health professional as Routine/ Urgent/Red Flag	An Acknowledgement is sent to the patient/carer. This includes confirmation of addition to waiting list; outcome of triage; information on what to expect and who to contact if circumstances change	Variation in approach – some Trusts send letters, others texts, others do not send any communication at this point
<b>Waiting 6 months</b>	Patient has resided on waiting list for 6 months or more	Update letter/text to confirm still on list and provision of current general wait time for specialty	Not in place
<b>Patient/Carer has additional queries</b>	Patient has additional queries or concerns in relation to their waiting list status	Trust Website – accessible waiting list information should be available to the general public within a dedicated section of each Trust website. Including what to expect; who to contact if circumstances change; access to general wait times; how to raise a complaint, etc	Not in place. A separate Department website was launched in May 2023 which provides general wait times
<b>Waiting 12 months +</b>	Patient has resided on waiting list for 12 months or more	Validation letter or text is sent to the patient requesting confirmation that the patient still requires the appointment and query whether their circumstances have changed	A refocus on this practice has taken place in recent years with the intent that it is reinstated on an ongoing basis across all specialties
<b>Fundamental Impact on Service</b>	A change has occurred within a service – which is likely to significantly impact on waiting times	Letter/Text sent to patient to advise of change/issue and potential impact	Not currently in place
<b>Clinic Appointment</b>	Following a clinic appointment, a Consultant/ Health professional dictates a letter recording the detail of the appointment, including addition to waiting lists	Letter is sent to the patient's GP and is cc'd to patient; or letter is addressed to Patient and GP cc'd	Not currently in place. Typically, the letter is sent only to the GP. However, the Consultant can request that a copy of the letter is sent to the patient. The Department suggest this will be addressed within Encompass
<b>Removal from the list</b>	A patient is removed from the waiting list – for example they have not responded to an invite to make an appointment or they have not attended an appointment	Letter sent advising of removal, with advice that the patient can request reinstatement within 4 weeks	Variation in approach – some Trusts advise of availability of reinstatement, others do not
<b>Complaint</b>	A patient or representative raises concerns in relation to waiting list progression	Trust provides open and honest responses – advising where issues have arisen/service impact and highlighting action that has been taken	Case Studies highlight requirement for perseverance to receive relevant information, including instances where relevant information was knowingly withheld.

**Own Initiative – 'Forgotten'**

An investigation by the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman into Healthcare Waiting List Communications