

# Patients To Refer Themselves For NHS Treatment

Oct 22, 2008

- Health Secretary give go ahead to roll out of self-referral schemes for allied health services

More people should have the freedom to self-refer for services such as physiotherapy and podiatry, which will further empower patients and could cut waiting times Health Secretary Alan Johnson announced today. While some Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) already take-on self-referrals, many do not and today's announcement will give the green light across the profession.

As part of a package of improvements to AHP services, Mr Johnson also announced the intention to collect new data on these areas to support the improvement of services. We will also introduce quality measures, which will lead to improvements in the overall standard of these services for patients and the public.

Recent research carried out by the Department of Health in partnership with the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) showed that self-referral to musculoskeletal physiotherapy resulted in patients:

- \* accessing services quicker;

- \* being more likely to complete their course of treatment and turn up for follow up appointments.

The research also showed that self-referral resulted in a lower level of work absence for patients and a high level of satisfaction from patients, GPs and physiotherapists.

Health Secretary Alan Johnson said:

"I am giving the green light to physiotherapists, podiatrists and all Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) that they can accept patients who self refer.

"Services provided by Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) play a vital part in building a society that's fair and inclusive.

"Podiatry, for example, is a vital service for older people as it improves their mobility ensuring that they are not unnecessarily confined to their homes."

"Self referral will help both vulnerable members of society and those with busy lives by providing quicker access without the unnecessary hoop jumping of going to see a doctor first."

Karen Middleton, Chief Health Professions Officer, said:

"I welcome the improvements to AHP services announced today. AHPs and their services can make all the difference to whether children or adults lead an independent and fulfilling life.

"This offer maximises the potential of AHPs as autonomous Practitioner."

Ralph Graham, Chairman of the Allied Health Professionals Federation (AHPF) said:

"The Allied Health Professions Federation has long campaigned for a better voice in the commissioning and planning of local healthcare and the AHPF is delighted that the Secretary of State for Health has made this announcement.

"We believe that these new commitments will mean a better service for patients and will lead to a better understanding by planners of the breadth of services provided by Allied Health Professionals."

-Ends-

Notes to Editors

1. There are over 76,000 AHPs. The professions are art therapists, drama therapists, music therapists, chiropodists/podiatrists, dietitians, occupational therapists, orthoptists, orthotists and prosthetists, paramedics, physiotherapists, diagnostic radiographers, therapeutic radiographers and speech and language therapists
2. For media enquiries only, please contact the DH newsdesk on 020 7210 5221. For all other enquiries please contact 020 7210 4850.
3. The existing Transforming Community Services (TCS) programme will produce a number of initiatives to support self-referral. A toolkit for the world class commissioning of community services will be published in November 2008 along with a new contract for community services.
4. Case studies:  
City and Hackney PCT have used self-referral to improve access to speech and language therapy for children under 5 by operating 'talking walk-in sessions' as the first point of contact.  
Portsmouth City Teaching PCT have used self-referral to allow the most vulnerable groups in their area to access podiatry services.
5. The AHP framing document "Framing the Contribution of AHPs - delivering high quality health care" and the AHP self referral document "Self-referral pilots to musculoskeletal physiotherapy and the implications for improving access to other AHP services" are available on the DH website.