

Dermatology - First Outpatient Appointment

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the NHS ability to provide routine elective services. We recognise that patients are waiting longer than we would all like and it is not always possible to identify when treatment will take place. This document provides you with information on how you are able to support yourself while waiting to attend the hospital. The guidance has been written by clinicians who are responsible for your care.

When you are waiting for further treatment it can sometimes feel like a long wait. The information and advice here is aimed at helping you manage that wait so you arrive for your appointment in the best possible physical and mental health.

The NHS has limited resources which means that we are unable to treat you as quickly as we would like. Each healthcare provider has to consider the type of help you need, how quickly you need treatment, the best course of action to help you and when and where you can be seen.

The process of sorting patients based on their individual needs is called prioritisation. The system of prioritisation is applied consistently across the NHS to help us to decide the order in which patients receive their treatment. This is essential to ensure that we provide care based on need. The system means that care is delivered in the fairest way possible.

Once a referral has been made from primary care to secondary care, the specialist team conduct assessments and then agree with you on the right course of action. At this stage, the urgency will be assessed. If you have a long-term health condition, for example, you may need treatment faster than someone without.

The dermatology service provides the diagnosis and management of a wide range of skin diseases for both adults and children. This includes inflammatory skin diseases, skin surgery, dermatitis patch testing, laser treatment and mole mapping. Both inpatient and outpatient facilities are available at Poole Hospital.

The services offered by dermatology include:

- Diagnosis and management of skin disease in adults and children
- Skin surgery – treatment of pre-malignant and malignant skin disease under local anaesthetic
- Skin grafts
- Leg ulcer clinics (nurse led)
- Patch testing service
- Cryotherapy of benign and pre-malignant lesions
- Phototherapy – PUVA (topical and oral) and narrowband UVB treatment of dermatosis
- Day treatment – topical applications for inflammatory dermatosis, including wet and dry wrapping

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- Photodynamic therapy of pre-malignant lesions

Before your appointment

Please bring with you details of all medications you are taking or have taken in the recent past, either for your skin or for any other condition you may have. This should include prescriptions from your doctor or other specialist, any alternative or herbal remedies and anything you have bought over the counter.

At your appointment

Your first appointment may take up to an hour. We make every effort to see you on time, but delays may occur so please allow plenty of time.

The clinician will take a full history and conduct an examination. In order to properly assess your skin problem, you may be asked to undress so that all your skin, not necessarily just the area(s) affected, can be examined. You will automatically be offered a chaperone should any intimate area of your body need examination, but in addition, please feel free to request a chaperone at any other time for any or all of the consultation.

We may request your permission to take photographs, to help form part of your clinical record or for reference in helping identify specific areas that may require treatment, such as skin surgery. These images will be stored electronically by the Hospital and shared with clinical personnel only when necessary.

It may be necessary to do additional investigations during your appointment including blood tests, skin sampling and/or skin biopsy. In these circumstances you will be provided with further detailed information.

After your appointment

If the doctor/nurse decides you need treatment, a letter will be sent to you and your GP providing a summary of your appointment outcome and explaining which medicines you may need prescribed.

Guidance for Patients

If your symptoms get worse this is known as a 'flare up'.

A flare is unpredictable and may start suddenly. It can last for hours, days or even months if not treated.

The British Association of Dermatologists (BAD) produce a wide range of Patient Information Leaflets relating to Dermatological conditions and contain information on what can cause a flare up of the condition and also how to manage your condition.

The link to the BAD web-site where you can access these patient leaflets is below:

<http://www.bad.org.uk/patient-information-leaflets>

You may also have been provided with a patient information leaflet by our staff and these will also contain information on how to manage your condition whilst waiting for an appointment or procedure.

The following information is available on the BAD web-site relating to the impact your condition may have on your mental health and how to access support.

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Skin and Your Wellbeing

A very common, but perhaps underdiscussed, aspect of having a skin condition is the impact it can have on your mental health and your enjoyment of everyday life. Although not everyone with a skin condition feels this way, there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that it is a widespread issue. There are many ways this can manifest itself, and the exact reasons can vary from person to person, but include things like:

Long-term: Many skin conditions don't have a cure, but instead must be managed over a life time, which can be draining.

Appearance: Skin conditions often have an impact on the way we look, and the way in which others perceive us. This can increase appearance-related distress, social isolation, and depression, amongst other things.

Sleep: Some skin conditions, such as eczema, can make it difficult to sleep. Anyone who has had long-term sleep disruption will know the impact that this can have on mental health.

Pain, discomfort, and itch: Many conditions can cause pain, discomfort, and chronic itchiness. Managing this can have a serious impact on your mental health.

In addition to this, there is evidence to suggest that in some cases stress, anxiety and emotional distress can manifest themselves on the skin and can aggravate an existing condition.

What to do if your skin is having an impact on your mental health?

If you are facing a mental health emergency and feel that you are a danger to yourself then you should call 999 immediately. For help and support, or for information on accessing mental health you could try either Samaritans or Mind.

If your need is less immediate then you should make an appointment with your GP or talk to your dermatologist. It may be that they can refer you to an expert or have access to psychodermatology professionals through their department. A list of Patient Support Groups who may be able to help can be found [here](#).

The more openly you can speak about your mental health, and the impact that your condition is having on it, the easier it will be for them to help you. If you don't get a satisfactory outcome you are within your rights to get a second opinion.

The Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme is another option. IAPT services provide treatments for people with anxiety and depression, and you can refer yourself, meaning you don't need approval from a doctor. You can search for IAPT services near you online, and self-referral is usually done through a website or on the phone.

If you can't access these services, or you don't feel that it's a step that you are ready to take then it is also possible to access online self-help. The British Association of Dermatologists has developed Skin Support to act as a hub for a range of information and self-help guides which focus on different aspects of skin disease.

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What should I do if my health is deteriorating?

If you feel your condition is deteriorating, for example your lesion is growing in size, or has become itchy or is bleeding, or if your psoriasis or eczema has become moist or is weeping fluid you should seek advice.

GP surgeries are still open and practice staff are also helping patients to manage their conditions at home while they wait for hospital appointments.

GP surgeries are still open and are working differently to how they did before the COVID-19 pandemic and GP practices continue to make best use of telephone, online and video consultations. Face -to-face appointments are still being given to those who need it.

When you phone or use an online form to contact your GP surgery to make an appointment, you will be asked some questions which are designed to help staff guide you to the most appropriate clinical person to help you with your condition. This could be a nurse, clinical pharmacist, physician's associate, GP or paramedic.

Urgent Health Advice

For urgent health advice about physical or mental health, when it's not an emergency, please call 111 from any landline or mobile phone. You can also visit www.nhs.uk. The NHS 111 service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Life Threatening Emergencies

For something life threatening – severe bleeding, breathing difficulties or chest pains – please dial 999.

Contact Us

PA to Dr Avinash Belgi & Dr Sarita Jain

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