**ADVICE SHEET**

**ATTENDING OUTPATIENTS**

* **Before the appointment**

As part of the NHS Constitution you have the right to start non-emergency, consultant-led treatment within 18 weeks of referral. Where cancer is suspected this should be within 4 weeks of referral.

Once your outpatient appointment has been booked with the hospital you should receive a letter with an appointment date and details about where to go when you arrive at the hospital. If you are uncertain about anything, please telephone the contact number on your letter. Let the hospital know if you need an interpreter or signer.

If you need help with transport, you are responsible for phoning the number on the letter to arrange this.

Check the appointment details and contact the hospital if you can't make the date – if you don't come to your appointment and don't let the hospital know, you will be discharged back to your GP who will then have to refer you again, costing both time and money. If you inform the hospital that you cannot attend your appointment, they can reallocate that appointment to somebody else who needs to be seen.

Please call the hospital if you develop diarrhoea and vomiting three days before your appointment as the appointment may need to be rescheduled.

Make some notes. Write down details of your symptoms, including when they started and what makes them better or worse. Take those notes with you on the day and then tick each point off during your appointment. If you like, take someone with you as support. List or bring all your medicines and pills – including vitamins and supplements.

You may also want to bring the following with you: a small amount of money in case you need to buy a drink or snack, information about any changes to your personal details, such as a new address or GP.

* **During the hospital appointment**

Although you have an allocated time slot for your appointment, you may have to wait as other appointments can overrun or the doctor may be called away to an emergency. Hospital staff will always try to keep you informed about any delays. You should therefore allow plenty of time for your visit, especially if this is your first appointment.

Write down your two or three most important questions.

*Tests, such as blood tests or scans*

What are the tests for? How and when will I get the results? Who do I contact if I don’t get the results? In general, the person requesting the tests is responsible for reviewing them and informing you of the results.

*Treatment*

Are there other ways to treat my condition? What do you recommend? Are there any side effects or risks? If so, what are they? How long will I need treatment for? How will I know if the treatment is working? How effective is this treatment? What will happen if I don’t have any treatment? Is there anything I should stop or avoid doing? Is there anything I can do to help myself?

*What next*

What happens next? Do I need to come back and see you? If so, when? Who do I contact if things get worse? Do you have any written information? Where can I go for more information? Is there a support group or any other source of help? Can I be sent copies of letters about me?

Don’t be afraid to ask questions about things you find unclear. Let the health professional explain it to you until you are sure you understand it. Don’t be afraid to ask if you don’t understand. For example, ‘Can you say that again? I still don’t understand.’? If you don’t understand any words, ask for them to be written down and explained.

Before you leave your appointment, check that you’ve covered everything on your list. Make sure that you understand what has been agreed and that you know what should happen next. Ask who to contact if you have any more problems or questions. You may wish to write this down, so take a pen and paper.

* **After the hospital appointment**

Write down what you discussed and what happens next. Keep your notes. Book any tests that you can and put the dates in your diary.

If you are discharged to your GP for follow up care your treatment plan will be sent there. The GP will receive a letter from the hospital explaining the changes (if any). You do not need to make an appointment to tell the GP of these changes as they will be detailed in the letter from the Hospital. This letter will not arrive immediately, but within a reasonable time.

If you need a follow up appointment this will be arranged by the hospital.

If you need tests these will be arranged by the hospital.

If you need to come into hospital for tests or an operation you will be contacted by the inpatient team to arrange this.

**The consultant’s secretary should be your first ‘port of call’ to contact if you do not hear from the hospital when expected (for example concerning results, follow up appointments, etc)**