



Enquiries to: Nick Steele
Deputy Director-General
Healthcare Purchasing and
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Telephone: 3708 5820
Our ref: C-ECTF-20/9237
Your ref:

Queensland Health

Dear General Practitioner

I write following my recent correspondence dated 12 June 2020, and the specific advice in relation to the continued suspension of Category 3 specialist outpatient appointments.

As you will be aware, in line with intent of the National Cabinet decision on 26 March 2020, Queensland health implemented a range of measures to refocus the public healthcare system. Specifically, in order to ensure that there was sufficient capacity available to deal with the forecast peak in COVID-19 cases, restrictions were introduced on the delivery and acceptance of non urgent category 2 and 3 elective surgery and category 3 specialist outpatients.

I understand this suspension has required our General Practice colleagues to manage a very difficult situation and I thank you and all colleagues across primary care for your collaboration with Queensland Health throughout the preparedness and planning to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since my correspondence, the Queensland Government has committed up to \$250 million in additional funding to support Queensland Health to provide care to those patients whose planned elective surgery, specialist outpatient appointment or gastrointestinal endoscopy was postponed due to the impacts of COVID-19. The recovery approach will be focused on the clinical needs of patients, and it is expected to take up to 12 months for the Queensland health system to address the backlog.

In view of this announcement, and following a recent consultation meeting with a range of key primary care stakeholders, I write to advise that from 1 July 2020, Hospital and Health Services (HHSs) across Queensland will start to process Category 3 referrals which have been returned to General Practice or put on hold since late March 2020. These referrals will be processed in order of the date they were originally received, unless they are a higher clinical priority.

I understand that HHSs have maintained details of valid Category 3 referrals that have been returned and, as such, these should be able to be processed without the need for re-referral from General Practice. However, in order to ensure that no patient is missed, can I request that from 1 July 2020 you re-refer all patients to the relevant hospital that were returned during this period where you believe there remains a requirement for a specialist consultation.

Given the volume of potential patients it could take up to 31 July 2020 for these patients to be processed and, where appropriate, accepted onto a waiting list. From 1 August 2020, HHSs will commence accepting new Category 3 referrals from General Practice and any valid referrals received in July 2020.

Similar transition arrangements have been adopted for elective surgery over the last few weeks and reflect the fact that the health system is not yet back up to full capacity and must continue to adhere to strict social distancing rules and remain ready to manage any increase in COVID-19 cases.

Our usual Clinical Prioritisation Criteria and Health Pathways, informed by clinical assessment, will ensure that referrals are triaged according to clinical urgency and in a safe, consistent and equitable manner. This is particularly important as Queensland Health starts to address the backlog of patients.

I have written to all HHS Chief Executives asking them to work collaboratively and proactively with their primary healthcare networks and primary care practitioners to effectively manage this transition process for Category 3 referrals.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic a considerable backlog of specialist outpatient work has built up across the system and I will be engaging heavily with key primary and secondary care stakeholders over the coming months to identify new models of care to address this backlog. As part of this work, I am keen to expand virtual healthcare, where appropriate, and strengthen the links between primary and secondary care clinicians.

I acknowledge and thank you for your responsiveness and patience during a period of considerable service disruption, and for your ongoing partnership in working to ensure Queensland continues to manage the risks of COVID-19.

Yours sincerely



Dr John Wakefield PSM
Director-General
23/6/2020

Cc Queensland Primary Health Networks