

**To all Northern Ireland:**

- General Dental Practitioners;
- CDS Clinical Directors (for cascade to all Community Dentists);
- HSC Trust Medical Directors (for cascade to all Hospital Dentists)
- General Medical Practitioners

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**1 October 2013**

Dear Colleague

**Referral of Patients Requiring Oral Medicine Services**

I am writing to set out the current arrangements for referring patients to HSC Trust-provided Oral Medicine (OM) services. Specifically, I want to clarify which patients are appropriate for Hospital OM services, where to refer patients and how to make a referral, particularly when oral cancer is suspected. I would ask you to note that while these are the extant arrangements they may change in the future. If this happens I will write to you again to explain the new arrangements.

Oral Medicine is the specialty of dentistry concerned with the oral health care of patients with chronic, recurrent and medically related disorders of the mouth and with their diagnosis and non-surgical management.

**1. Which patients to refer**

Referral criteria for Trust-provided OM services are set out in appendix 1. If you have a patient that you feel should be referred for OM care but they do not fit with these criteria, you should contact your local Trust Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery (OMFS)/Oral Surgery (OS)/OM service for advice.

Please note that Trusts will refuse to see patients who have been referred to them when the treatment required is available under the General Dental Services but the patient does not wish to pay.

## 2. Where to refer patients

The initial referral of an OM patient should be to your local Trust (i.e. the OMFS/OS/OM service in the Trust within whose boundaries the referring practice is located) rather than to the regional OM service. Use the map and table in appendix 2 to determine your home Trust then consult appendix 3 to find the clinic address closest to your practice. In some cases there will be 2 sites within a single Trust providing OM/OS/OMFS care. Send your referral letter to the clinic in that Trust which is located closest to the practice.

## 3. Referral Categories

In Northern Ireland three referral categories are used:

**Red Flag:** only for suspected cases of cancer (patient to be seen within two weeks).

**Urgent:** Non-cancer cases which need to be seen urgently.

**Routine:** all other cases.

These categories may differ from other national guidance such as that quoted in the Reference section at the end of this letter. However, we require that referring practitioners use the Northern Ireland classification detailed above.

Referrals placed in the Red Flag category are routinely audited and where there is a pattern of repeated inappropriate referrals then Trusts will communicate this to the referring practitioner to make them aware of the problem.

## 4. Suspected Oral Cancer

If you are concerned that your patient may have oral cancer you should tick the Red Flag box in the Urgency of Referral section in the referral pro forma (appendix 4). It is important to stress that the Red Flag criterion is strictly for cases of suspected cancer.

Post or fax the completed pro forma to the Hub site (see Appendix 3) of your local Trust OM/OS/OMFS service. You should also phone the relevant Trust unit to confirm that they have received your referral. All applicable contact details are set out in appendix 3.

## 5. Other OM conditions (urgent or routine)

If your patient fits the referral criteria set out in appendix 1 but you do not suspect oral cancer you should complete the referral pro forma (appendix 4) and in the Urgency of Referral section tick the appropriate box (Urgent or Routine). Post or fax the completed pro forma to your local Trust OM/OS/OMFS service.

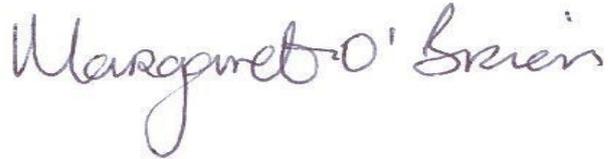
The referral pro forma is attached at appendix 4. You should make copies of this blank pro forma for future use. Photographs of the clinical lesion are also welcomed. This letter and all the appendices are available for download at: <http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/2470.htm>

I hope you find the above information useful.

Yours sincerely



**MICHAEL DONALDSON**  
Head of Dental Services



**DR MARGARET O'BRIEN**  
Head of GMS Services

## References

Referring practitioners may find the following reference material useful. Please note that the referral categories used in these reference documents differ from the Northern Ireland Classification of: Red Flag, Urgent, Routine.

Cancer Research UK 'Mouth Cancer – Referral Guidelines For Dentists':  
<http://publications.cancerresearchuk.org/downloads/product/dentist1.pdf>

Referral Guidelines for suspected cancer, NICE Clinical Guideline 27':  
<http://cks.nice.org.uk/headneck-cancer-suspected#!references>

NICE Guidance on Cancer Services – Improving Outcomes in Head and Neck Cancers':  
<http://www.nice.org.uk/CSGHN>

Northern Ireland Referral Guidance for Suspected Cancer – Red Flag Criteria:  
<http://www.cancerni.net/node/1610>

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