



Department
of Health

From the Rt Hon the Earl Howe P.C.
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Quality (Lords)

Ref: POC6_869739

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23 JUL 2014

Dear Margaret,

Thank you for your email following up on my letter to you regarding patient choice. I am sorry that the previous answer did not provide you with sufficient clarity about choice of health service provider and consultant-led teams.

To clarify, the choice provisions for first outpatient appointment apply to only the first GP to consultant referral for physical health or named-health professional-led team in mental health. The rights to choose a health service provider and consultant-led team cannot simply be fulfilled by referring a patient to 'any' consultant, but to one that is clinically appropriate for the patient in respect of the condition for which they have been referred. Therefore, depending on the nature of the condition, as presented to the GP, a referral would be made to someone specialising in that clinical area. That specialist could be employed by any Trust that has a contract with any clinical commissioning group (CCG) in England, allowing for extensive choice across many clinical areas, even in speciality areas like Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS)/Myalgic Encephalopathy (ME).

It should also be noted that any referral process should involve a discussion between the patient and referring health professional. When good practice is followed, choice and information about the options available are publicised and promoted to enable patients to make an informed choice of a health service provider and consultant-led team. NHS Choices (www.nhs.uk) is a key resource for patients, as it allows them to locate hospitals with specialist consultants and to use the feedback service to rate providers.

I understand from your email that the diagnosis of CFS/ME is far from straightforward. I am also aware that the choice right pertaining to the first outpatient appointment is limiting to patients like [REDACTED] who have had a

complex process of getting appropriate treatment. I would like to assure you that alongside partners in the health system, the Department is exploring areas in which to extend the choices available to patients, and embedding the offer of choice in everyday practice.

To progress the case of [REDACTED] I recommend that he contacts his CCG again to request choice of provider and consultant-led team. If having done this [REDACTED] not satisfied, then I recommend that he contacts the Health Ombudsman to take up his concerns about a lack of appropriate treatment for his condition.

I hope that this reply is helpful to you and Mr [REDACTED]

Yours ever,

Freddie

EARL HOWE