

## Bedfordshire Musculoskeletal (MSK) Service: Changes to MRI referrals

**From May 2018, Bedfordshire patients seeing their GP with a routine musculoskeletal (MSK) condition will be referred direct to the Bedfordshire MSK Service<sup>i</sup> rather than having an MRI first.**

### Why has the new referral process been introduced?

- Patients are being referred for MRI scans who do not need them. As at April 2018, 1 in 5 referrals are not needed, with patients waiting up to 12 weeks to start treatment for routine conditions, such as age-related wear and tear.
- The number of requests for MRI scans is increasing every year. This puts pressure on the diagnostic services at the hospital and can lead to longer waiting times for diagnosing conditions such as cancer. The new referral process shortens waiting times for treatment for routine MSK conditions.

### What is the new referral process?

GPs will refer patients who go to them with a routine MSK condition, such as sore backs, hips and knees, directly to Bedfordshire MSK Service which is provided by Circle Health.

On receiving the referral, the Bedfordshire MSK service will assess the patient's condition and decide on the treatment required:

- If the MSK Service decides the patient does not need an MRI scan - within 4 weeks, they will either begin treatment with the MSK service or be referred on to a Hospital Consultant
- If the MSK Service decides an MRI scan is required - the MSK Service will refer the patient for the scan; patients should have the scan within 4 weeks of the date the referral was made
- Following the results of the MRI scan - patients will either start their treatment with the Circle MSK service or be referred on to a hospital consultant

## What will be the benefits for patients?

- *Saving GP Practice time:*
  - Patients will only need to attend the surgery once, making more appointments available
  - An audit showed that the majority of patients who have an MRI are subsequently referred to the MSK service - this will speed up the process
- *Improved patient experience:*
  - Presently from referral to the receipt of MRI reports can take 8 weeks before a referral to Circle is made – reducing the number of MRI scans will speed up the patient journey
  - No unnecessary MRIs
- *Reduction in MRI activity (by ensuring all tests are appropriate and necessary):*
  - Reducing demand at the hospitals will lead to shorter waiting times
  - Improved cancer target achievement

## Who is affected by the new referral process?

The pathway is for adult patients with **routine** MSK conditions.

## Who is not affected by the new referral process?

Where a GP has significant clinical suspicion that there is a condition requiring clarification that may be serious and may require urgent intervention, or diagnostic doubt that there may be a serious underlying condition.

The referral pathway does not affect children or any patients with urgent conditions such as:

- **Cancer or suspected cancer** (*GPs will follow the 2 week wait pathway*)
- **Cauda Equina Syndrome** (*damage to the bundle of nerves below the end of the spinal cord known as the cauda equina*)
- **Significant trauma;** (*fracture/dislocation*)
- **Neurological deficit** (*abnormal function of a body area due to weaker function of the brain, spinal cord, muscles or nerves*)
- **Infections** (*including suspected septic arthritis*)
- **Inflammatory arthritis** (*including rheumatoid arthritis, psoriatic arthropathy, inflammatory bowel disease, Still's disease, scleroderma and systemic lupus*)
- **Temporal arteritis** (*chronic inflammation of the arteries of the head, which supply oxygenated blood to portions of the head and brain*)
- **Acute tendon rupture**

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<sup>i</sup> The Bedfordshire MSK Service is provided by Circle; the service is commissioned by Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (BCCG)