

EXAMPLE PROJECT OUTLINE FOR A RETROSPECTIVE AUDIT OF REFERRAL LETTERS.

7.1 Introduction

Referral Letters are frequently the only method by which information is transmitted between general dental practitioners and the hospital-based services. It is essential that referral letters and the replies, which provide a crucial link between GDPs and specialists, are of the highest possible standard. Referral letters need to contain both administrative data and clinical details, should be stored appropriately and a follow up of urgent referrals undertaken.

The referral process should be efficient and effective for the patient, the referring GDP and the recipient of the referral letter. Opinions regarding what constitutes a reasonable standard of referral letter may vary between specialists and GDPs.

The primary objective of this retrospective audit will be to assess a random sample of referral letters sent for their quality and appropriateness.

NB: Electronic referrals are being piloted in Wales and once introduced should reduce the number of inappropriate referrals.

7.2 Who would be involved

Dentists and anyone in the team who may use or receive referrals

DCPs

Reception staff

7.3 Sources

The following list is not exhaustive, but is a useful guide:

Online: Pubmed

Locally sourced protocols from MCN, Health Boards or LDC
FGDP(UK): CERK (Clinical Examination and Record Keeping 2016) or Standards in dentistry (2006 update due 2018)

Dental Protection organisations

7.4 Aim

To audit a sample of the referral letters sent to specialists for their quality and appropriateness.

7.5 Objectives

- To search for and review relevant papers from the literature. Use PubMed www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov as well as local protocols eg: locally issued guidance and referral pro forma.
- To use the literature review to prepare a standard that defines appropriate referral.
- To set a standard that lists the details and information expected to be included in a referral.
- To design a data collection sheet.
- To review retrospectively a random sample of referral letters for appropriateness and quality and compare them against the standards set
- To analyse the results and identify areas of weakness
- To implement changes and improvements to the identified areas of weakness
- To re-audit after a suitable period

7.6 Suggested Method

Use an on-line literature search using PubMed for 'Dental Referral Letters'. Apply limits, human, English and dental. Obtain and read copies of relevant papers and use the information gained to set the standard for the audit. (see 7.3) Decide what data is to be collected and design a data collection sheet.

Select a random sample of referral letters sent by members of the audit group. Assess each referral letter against the standard set and record the results onto the data collection sheet.

Analyse and discuss the results.

Identify areas where improvements may be required and consider how to effect such improvements.

Finally make a list of conclusions.