

A review of the Referral Management System information and it's use by Barnet GPs.

November 2019

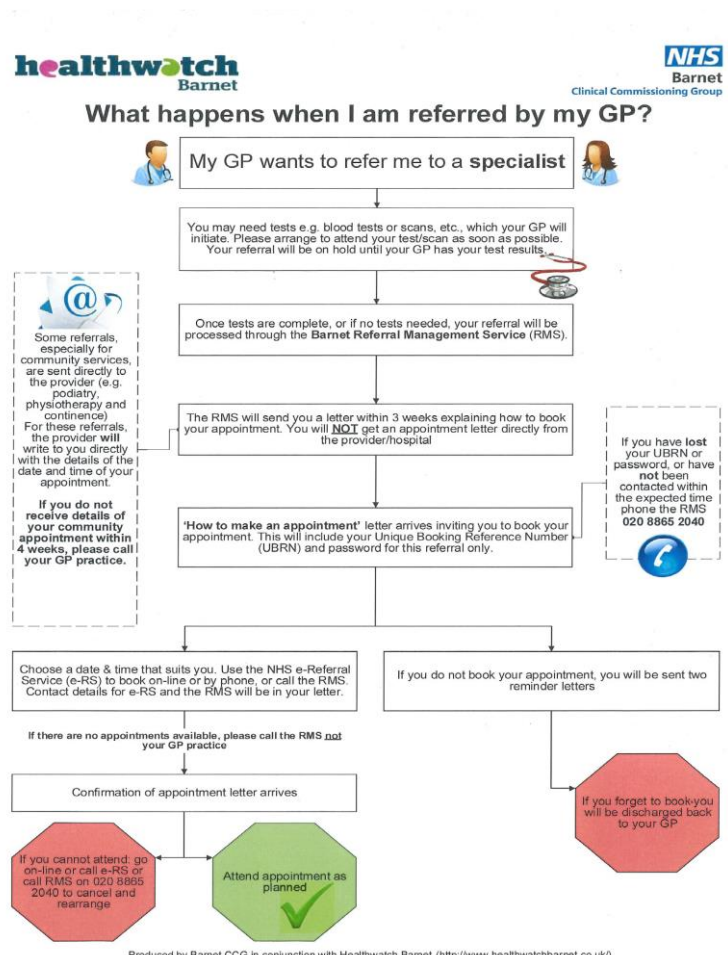
Introduction

Barnet CCG in conjunction with Healthwatch Barnet created a Referral Management Service flow chart in 2018 also known as the 'RMS poster'. This report reviews the awareness and promotion of this poster in Barnet's 52 GP practices.

Patient Referrals Process

Where a GP believes the patient should be seen by a specialist, they send the referral to the Referral Management Service. The RMS team send the patient a letter within three weeks of the referral explaining how to book an appointment. The 'How to make an appointment' letter includes a Unique Booking Reference Number (UBRN) and password for that particular referral using the NHS e-Referral Service (e-RS) to book on-line. Patients can also book via telephone by calling the RMS. Both contact details for RMS and e-RS are included in the letter. It is the patient's responsibility to book the appointment using their login details. The patients choose a date and time for their appointment that suits them. A further letter confirming the appointment will be sent to the patient. Patients who do not book an appointment will be sent two reminder letters before the RMS discharge the patient back to their GP.

The RMS poster is intended to prevent patients from returning to their GP after failing to secure a referral appointment with a specialist. Patients' feedback suggests that many were 'getting lost in the system' due to a limited understanding of how the RMS system operates. As a result, patients' treatments were becoming delayed creating inconveniences for both patient and healthcare providers.



Barnet CCG and Healthwatch Barnet created the RMS poster which provides a step by step guide explaining what to do when a patient is referred. In February 2019, Healthwatch Barnet presented the poster to a meeting of the Barnet practice manager’s forum where it was explained and warmly received by practice managers and distributed to all attendees. Further copies were requested as well as 9 requests by email and phone from practices in the following week. In April 2019, the A3 laminated poster was posted to every practice manager in Barnet in addition to additional A4 and A5 copies. Each practice and practice manager were also sent PDF and versions of the document in April 2019 by email and in Word format in June 2019.

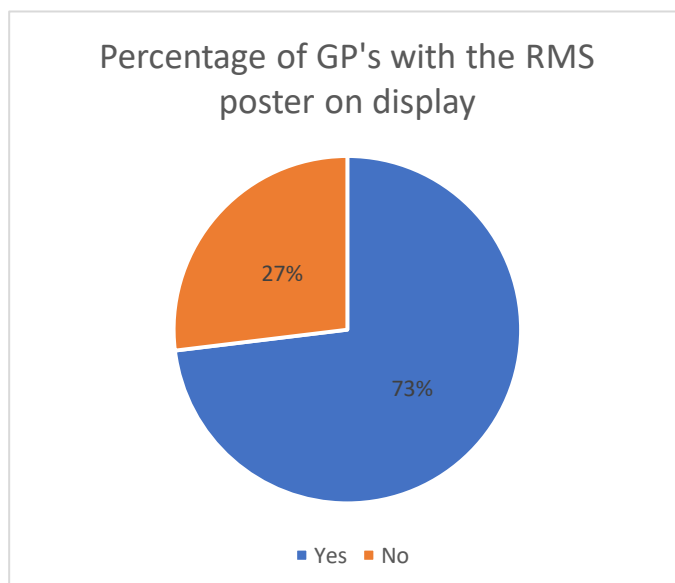
Methodology

To review the awareness and promotion of the RMS poster and leaflets, Healthwatch Barnet conducted a mystery shopping exercise in all 52 GP practices in the borough in Healthwatch Barnet staff and volunteers attended every GP in person to see if the RMS poster was on display and ask practice staff whether patients were receiving a copy when referred to a specialist. These visits took place in June and July 2019. During the visits, the team looked for the poster and the information in the practice and then spoke to staff at reception about their awareness of the poster. Where practices did not have the poster on display, a further copy was delivered by the team and all practices that said they still did not have a poster were given a further laminated copy and/ or emailed further PDF copies.

Findings

The findings of the review suggest that while most GP practices are promoting the poster, there is room for improvement for all. In total Healthwatch visited the 52 GP practices across Barnet. We received feedback from several practices, who have used the leaflet and poster, and reported that this reduced the number of questions they received from patients.

Promotion of RMS poster



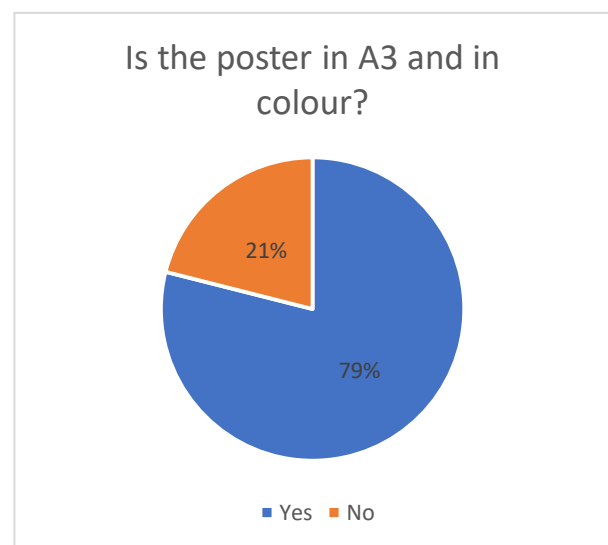
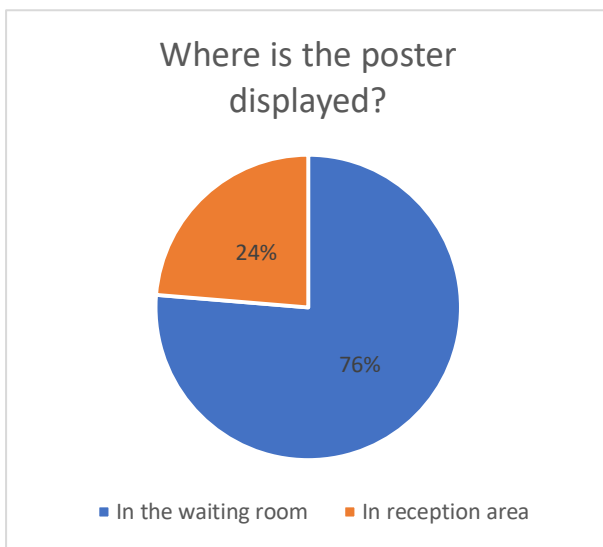
- 38 practices (73%) had the RMS poster on display

- 14 practices (27%) did not have the RMS poster displayed

It is encouraging that most GP practices are promoting the poster, however there is room for improvement.

Of the 38 GPs that had the RMS poster

- 30 practices had a coloured A3 laminated copy of the poster
- 8 surgeries did not have the poster in A3 and colour. Instead these practices had A4 copies of the poster all in colour.
- 29 of the posters were displayed in the waiting area and 9 of the posters were displayed by reception.
- 12 practices had more than one poster on display.
- 32 posters were clearly visible. In 6 practices, the poster was displayed on cluttered notice boards in the waiting room which the team found difficult to locate.



Awareness and use of RMS poster

The Healthwatch Barnet team asked the reception staff at each practice whether they were aware of the RMS poster and their experience of using it. We found that many staff even where the poster and leaflets were in use had not heard about or used the flow chart. The discussions also identified the challenges that patients are experiencing with the RMS system.

- **For those 15 practices that did not have the poster displayed; 6 welcomed the posters by Healthwatch Barnet**

‘Receptionist thought the RMS poster was a good idea and would like to have leaflet copies to give to the patients when referred to a specialist’

‘Asked for a further poster to be sent to them. Receptionist is aware patients struggle when referred’

- **In 16 of the practices that had the RMS poster displayed, the receptionist was not aware of the poster.**

‘Receptionist said they are unaware if they have received a poster’

*'They give RMS number to patients, often the patients will return and then they will do a follow up call on behalf of the patients.
Receptionist did not know about the RMS poster'*

'No one in the practice, when I visited knew anything about the RMS information. Have explained to receptionist who states that staff are keen to have the leaflets'

- **In 38 of practices where the poster was displayed, the receptionist was unaware if a copy was being handed to the patients when referred to see a specialist.**

'They don't hand out leaflets, just give a verbal explanation'

'Copies are not being handed to the patients but suggested they start doing that. They still seem to get a lot of phone calls, and said they would get fewer if they started handing them out'

- **6 GP practices, including those who had the poster, were providing patients with a contact number on a small piece of paper when referred to specialist**

'Don't have any posters or leaflets, only a contact number. Said they have not received the poster'

'Patients still being given just the number, agreed it wouldn't be needed if they gave out the poster'

- **3 practices reported that they would call the number for the patients to book an appointment**

'Staff are still booking appointments; unaware patients can book for themselves. They would like leaflets'

'Staff don't hand out leaflets, just give a verbal explanation. People do come when having difficulties, receptionist do a follow up call. Many people who struggle are elderly, hard of hearing, people who have general difficulties and whose English is their second language'

- **5 practices said it was common for patients to return to them without being able to book an appointment**

'Receptionist said this has been a problem. She will photocopy the poster and give one to patients when referred to a specialist'

'Receptionist said patients always end up going back to them even if they book the appointments themselves. Specialist always refer patients back to the GP'

- **There were several barriers identified by practice staff that prevented patients being able to book an appointment with a specialist when referred by their GP**

'The main people who struggle are elderly, hard of hearing people who have general difficulties and whose English is their second language'

- We received feedback from one GP, who has used the leaflet and poster, that this reduced the number of questions they received from patients.

‘Two staff at reception did not know and got the practice manager. She said they hand out A4 copies to patients and it has been very helpful. Said the PPG have been heavily involved and they did an audit at the practice and found that patients returning after being given a poster had reduced significantly.’

Conclusions and Recommendations

This review has identified that there is a need for the RMS poster. GP practices would benefit by providing patients a copy of the poster to reduce the number of patients returning after being referred to a specialist and patients would benefit by having a step by step guide on how to book an appointment with a specialist. There needs to be more internal communication from management to ensure all staff are aware of the RMS system and the posters. While conducting this review, we found that many practices have a lot of posters and information at their surgeries, some of which was out of date and walls and displays were so crowded with material as to make them illegible. We suggest that all practice explore the having a quarterly review of their posters and leaflets, so they are aware what information is available at their surgeries and ensure that all information on display is up to date and relevant.

We recommend the following to ensure good practice is followed:

- Practices display the poster clearly visible to patients in the reception or waiting areas.
- Practices review and update their posters and leaflets on in their reception area regularly.
- All GP practices provide patients with an A4 or A5 copy of the poster when referred to a specialist.
- Ensure that all GP staff are aware of the process of referral and are aware of the poster and leaflet with the flowchart to distribute to patients when required.
- Practices to promote the RMS poster and use of RMS system on their website.

About Healthwatch

Healthwatch Barnet is an independent charity and part of a national network led by Healthwatch England, which was established through the Health and Social Care Act in 2012, to give service users of health and social care services a powerful voice both locally and nationally. We are the independent voice for people’s views on Barnet services, both

good and bad. We listen to local people and feedback patient experience and liaise with local commissioners and decision makers, in order to improve services.

Response from Barnet Federated GPs

This report is comprehensive and we appreciate the work that has gone into the project, it is rewarding to see the impact this poster has had reducing the administration time needed to support RMS queries. It does highlight again the poor communication across the Borough. How we take this good work and disseminate it to practices and then Practices share with their staff is key. We fully support the recommendations and am interested to understand the current pathway used to disseminate information to Practices. Of course, the Federation are happy to support with sharing such valuable work.

With thanks

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Barnet Practice Managers Forum

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