

University of Southampton Hospital Testicular Self-Referral Pilot Service Patient Experience Report

Background

Wessex Cancer Alliance, working with the Rapid Investigation Service and University Hospital Southampton, piloted a self-referral service to enable those with concerns about their testicles to get them checked. As part of its development, we spoke to people about their experiences of it. This is a summary of the findings and recommendations.

Summary of findings

- Everyone was positive about their experience of the pilot service and went away reassured
- Self-referral was unanimously supported for its convenience and because it shortened the time to getting results
- The service video was useful and easy to understand, with only a couple of suggested amendments
- The service was easy to access and patients had a good experience of staff throughout the pathway
- The main areas for improvement were:
 - making sure everyone has a same day appointment as far as possible
 - hospital signposting and patient information

Pilot service recommendations

- To continue to promote access to the service e.g. via GP e-consults, as well as posters targeted at eligible men
- To consider how to make the service contact number more accessible, and to provide further details about size and consistency of lumps to look out for in the service animation
- To ensure patients have understood the service steps during the first phone call, using Health Literacy approaches like 'Teachback' and 'Chunk and Check'
- To consider how appointments could be agreed by phone rather than letter
- For the pilot team to review existing Urology patient information in light of this feedback and see if there is any additional information that can be provided

Wider service recommendations

- To strive to ensure all patients have same day 'one stop' appointments for both the scan and results by the consultant
- To improve signage and directions to the hospital departments
- To review patient information based on the feedback received

Service background

The testicular self-referral pilot started on 22nd July 2024 and is for people aged 18-50 with a painless, testicular lump. People can refer themselves and this means they do not need to be seen at their GP surgery. Eligible patients will be offered a scan at Southampton General Hospital, followed by an appointment on the same day with a specialist consultant. Most people with a testicular lump will not have cancer so this service is to rule out cancer, or diagnose it, faster.

Currently, self-referral is not a common practise in the NHS so feedback from patients who have used the service will help us to understand what worked well, and what can be improved in future. This will help us to improve access to medical services and support patients to have cancer ruled out or diagnosed faster and earlier.

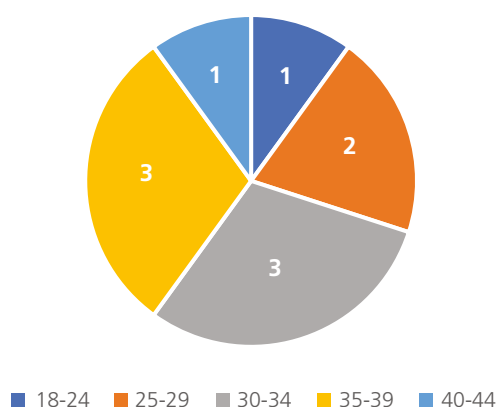
What we did

We interviewed 10 men who had been through the whole pathway and had been discharged. The semi-structured, qualitative, telephone interviews were carried out by a member of the Wessex Cancer Alliance team to allow participants to share their views with someone independent and not associated with the service. They took place over a five-month period (between September 2024 - January 2025) once the service started. (See Appendix A for the interview questions.)

Who we interviewed

All the 10 men were under the age of 44. Two interviewees were white British and others had wide range of ethnicities including Arab, Chinese, Iranian, Pakistani, mixed race and 'white other background'. Eight out of the ten did not have a disability or a long term, life-limiting physical or mental illness or condition.

Age of interviewees



Three were registered with St Mary's GP practice; three were from Aldermoor, and another three were from different practices in the west of Southampton. The remaining person came from another area of the city.

What we found

Finding out about the service

Five of the 10 interviewees were sent a text message. Most said they were aware this came from their GP practice, two specifically referenced their NHS app. One said this felt personalised coming via the app. Two said their GP had told them about the service and another two said that they had seen a poster, one of those in a surgery they were visiting but not registered at. One said they could not remember but said they were sent the link to the service's video resource explaining how to self examine and access the service.

Four men volunteered they had relevant health concerns that meant this was a service they would be keen to access. One shared that the consultant had said that they should have already been referred by their GP, and two others felt that their concerns had been minimised by GPs. They were therefore pleased to have a self-referral service to be able to approach for further investigation.

"The poster was a silent way to indicate that the service is available as we don't talk about it. Good way to get looked after. More GPs should have it."

Views on the service animation

Eight of the men said they had accessed the animation and they said they had found it useful. They commented that it covered the right type of information and that it was clear, simple and the right length. One felt it was reassuring and a couple liked the visuals, one commenting that this was better than written information.

Two possible improvements were identified:

- Having another way of seeing the service number so you do not need to watch it to the end again to be able to access this.
- A more detailed description of the size and consistency of lumps to look out for.

One person could not access the animation and another had not had access to it.

Accessing the service directly

Everyone agreed self-referral was better than having to go to the GP first. They felt it was much easier and more convenient than trying to get an appointment, especially when working, and it also shortened the journey to getting an answer. Some found it reassuring, either because they felt their GP had not taken their concerns seriously, or they themselves had deprioritised their own concerns thinking it would be difficult to get a GP appointment.

"Without the GP message I would never have done the check up. I would have expected it to take a long time – a few weeks to get a GP appointment and perhaps an explanation from the GP that would mean that I didn't get the proper check up. This was something different as I wouldn't have raised this proactively with my GP as I didn't prioritise it as it wasn't causing any harm or pain – just a few lumps. Phone the GP you are in a very long queue and it can be quite painful. Avoiding the queue means it is a better service."

Accessing the service

Everyone found accessing the service by phone easy. Even where calls were not answered immediately and interviewees had to leave a message, they said the call back time was acceptable. Some specifically mentioned the speed at which they were issued a letter with their appointments after the call as a positive.

One did, however, say that it would have been nice to have been able to check the appointment times being offered on the phone call as he was not able to make the first appointment. He had to find another time, so his first and second appointments were not on the same day.

Explanation of the service

Most people said that the explanation about the service was clear and thought the nurse doing the calls was very good. However, two people were not clear about the steps in the pathway.

"Overall brilliant and the woman on the phone was very nice but I was left a bit confused about whether I would see the consultant and have the scan on the same day – but the email after answered the questions. I was not perhaps taking everything in as I was quite worried."

The ultrasound appointment

Interviewees said the wait time between the phone call to access the service and having the scan was fine. One person mentioned it was good to be asked if they wanted a male physician and that was beyond their expectations.

A couple of people mentioned that it was not easy to find the right pace to go for the scan, or to find the Urology department. They were confused by hospital signage so the directions in letters needs to reflect this accurately.

"I was not sure where the appointment was. I had the hospital name but when I got there it was not easy to find radiology in the hospital. It could have been x-ray but I was confused by the signage. I went to one area but they said they didn't have me on the list so I had to go to another area. I can't remember receiving the letter with more details."

Interviewees generally said they were given a good explanation of what was happening during the scan.

"It was awkward to have but they explained everything as well as I would have liked."

"It was my first time having the scan. It was alright ... He said everything looks normal, and then asked me what part of the testes to you have concern about so looked more carefully. It was reassuring. I would like to have another in a year's time."

Experience of same day appointment

Feedback was received about patient information and signposting in the Urology department, which has been discussed directly with the service. One said the receptionist did not know why he was there, and the other was not sure whether they should just sit and wait to be called or to report to reception.

Most people said the time with the consultant was helpful and reassuring.

"The consultant was very nice, reassuring and friendly. He made me feel comfortable. He did explain some reasons why it may be happening. He was also more educating."

"The consultant was really helpful. The way he used words was also helpful – saying your balls (rather than testicles) are fine so it doesn't make it serious."

Two people mentioned not being able to have a same day appointment. Both said this did not cause a problem for them because the radiographer had provided reassurance during the scan.

Explanation of next steps

Everyone said that they were given a clear explanation of what would happen next and were offered the opportunity to ask questions if they had them.

"Yes it was good. I was asked if wanted to ask questions but didn't need to ask many as they answered everything I needed to know."

Written summary

Nine out of 10 men had received their written summary. Everyone said again that this was clear and they could not suggest any improvements to be made.

Overall experience

Everyone said that they had a positive overall experience of the service: how they could access it, how they were treated, the speed at which they were seen, and the reassurance they were given. They would recommend it to others who needed a similar service.

This quote is indicative of an interviewee not wanting others to miss out on this service:

"My only suggestion would be to notify people again if they don't respond or miss the first message about the service, and appointments."

Online self-referral form

Most people said that having an online self-referral form may be helpful as long as it was as good as speaking to someone on the phone. A couple of men acknowledged that younger people may find it easier to use. One person said it needs to be available at any time.

"Yes but only if it is open to fill in at any time - not like GP e-consult which is only open for 20-30 mins early each morning."

One person said they preferred speaking to someone, and another mentioned it may be more efficient to make the appointments by phone.

Recommendations

Pilot service recommendations

- To continue to promote access to the service e.g. via GP e-consults, as well as posters targeted at eligible men
- To consider how to make the service contact number more accessible, and to provide further details about size and consistency of lumps to look out for in the service animation
- To ensure patients have understood the service steps during the first phone call, using Health Literacy approaches like 'Teachback' and 'Chunk and Check'
- To consider how appointments could be agreed by phone rather than letter
- For the pilot team to review existing Urology patient information in light of this feedback and see if there is any additional information that can be provided

Wider service recommendations

- To strive to ensure all patients have same day 'one stop' appointments for both the scan and results by the consultant
- To improve signage and directions to the hospital departments
- To review patient information based on the feedback received

Contact details: Sue Newell, Involvement and Inclusion Lead at sue.newell@wca.uhs.nhs.uk

Appendix A: Interview questions and script

- Hello, my name is ...
- I have been given your contact details by the Testicular Self-Referral Pilot Service and would like to ask you about your recent experiences of this service.
- Confirm who talking to – note if carer because patient unable to give feedback.
- The aim is to use your feedback to improve and develop the service so that it could be established across Hampshire, the Isle of Wight and Dorset.
- Everything you say will be feedback anonymously so you can't be identified.
- We haven't got any information about your health and will only ask about your journey through the service.
- Explain the structure of the survey and questions briefly.
- Say roughly how long it will take / detailed because of new service.
- Ask for consent to record the discussion.
- You don't have to answer a question if you don't want to, and you can stop or withdraw your consent at any time during the interview.
- Are you Ok to go ahead?

1. How did you find out about testicular service?

Prompts

Receptionist? From the GP? From seeing the advertisements in the surgery? From the animation? Elsewhere (word of mouth/social media?)

2. Did you watch the film, and if so, what did you think about the film?

Prompts

Did it allow you to feel confident to perform a self-examination?

Do you feel you could regularly perform these in future?

Was the self-referral service journey made clear?

Was there anything else that could have been made clearer?

If you didn't, why didn't you watch it?

3. How did you feel about using this self-referral service rather than seeing the GP?

4. How did you find getting in touch with the service?

Prompts

Did you have any practical or access issues? E.g. with telephone calls

5. What did you think of the information you were given during the first call?

Prompts

Did they give you all the information you needed? E.g. Contact details / introduce themselves.

Were you given a leaflet?

Was it clear what the service was and what would happen?

Were you given the opportunity to ask questions? What did you think of the responses you got?

Was there anything else that could have been improved?

6. How did you find the process of receiving ultrasound appointment?

Prompts

How did you feel about the wait between self-referral call and booking process?

Was there anything that can be done differently?

7. What did you think about the same day appointment you had about your health concerns? (with consultant at one stop shop)

Prompts

Were you given opportunities to ask questions?

What did you think of the responses you were given?

If you were given information and advice, did you use it?

Was there anything that was particularly useful to you?

Is there anything else that could have helped?

8. What did you think about what you were told about what was going to happen next?

Prompts

What was this experience like?

How well did you understand this? Was it clear?

Were you given time to digest this and ask questions? How were they answered?

Is there anything else that would have helped you at this point?

9. Have you received a written summary from the service yet? If yes, what did you think of it?

Prompts

Did you understand it? Was the language clear, jargon free?

Did the letter reflect the conversation at your appointment?

How quickly did you receive it after your appointment/treatment?

Is there any way it can be improved?

If they mention they have been to GP appointment already – ask whether they GP had access to it at any follow up appointment they may have had.

10. Overall, how do you feel about how you were looked after by the Service?

Prompts

Were you satisfied with the outcome? Did you feel reassured by the service?

Is there anything else or anyone that you would like to tell us about?

Is there anything else that could be done to improve the service?

Would you recommend this service to friends and family?

11. In future, we'd like to consider developing an online self-referral form, what do you think of this idea?

Finally a few questions about you

These are completely optional and will help us see if we are providing a good level of service to everyone who uses the service.

1. Which GP practice are you registered with?

North

- Burgess Road Surgery
- University Health Service Southampton
- Stoneham Lane Surgery
- Highfield Health
- Walnut Tree Surgery

West

- Lordshill Health Centre
- Victor Street Surgery
- Shirley Avenue and Cheviot Road Practice
- Shirley Health Partnership
- Aldermoor Surgery
- Atherley House Surgery
- Raymond Road
- Hill Lane Surgery
- Brook House Surgery

Central

- St Mary's Surgery
- Alma Road Surgery
- Mulberry Surgery
- Homeless Healthcare
- Solent GP Surgery

Bitterne

- West End Road Surgery
- The Peartree Practice
- Living Well Partnership

Woolston

- Woolston Lodge Surgery
- The Old Fire Station Surgery
- Chartwell Green Surgery
- St Peter's Surgery

2. Which of the following options best describes how you think of yourself?

- a) Man
- b) Woman (including trans woman)
- c) Non-binary
- d) In another way
- e) Not stated (PERSON asked but declined to provide a response)
- f) Not known (not recorded)

3. Is your gender identity the same as the gender you were given at birth?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Not stated (PERSON asked but declined to provide a response).
- d) Not known (not recorded)

4. How old are you?

- a) 18-24
- b) 25-29
- c) 30-34
- d) 35-39
- e) 40-44
- f) 45-50

5. How would you describe your ethnic origin?

A. White

- a) White
- b) English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British
- c) Irish
- d) Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- e) Any other White background

B. Mixed / multiple ethnic groups

- a) White and Black Caribbean
- b) White and Black African
- c) White and Asian
- d) Any other Mixed / multiple ethnic background

C. Asian / Asian British

- e) Indian
- f) Pakistani
- g) Bangladeshi
- h) Chinese
- i) Any other Asian background

D. Black / African / Caribbean / Black British

- j) African
- k) Caribbean
- l) Any other Black/African/Caribbean background

E. Other ethnic group

- m) Arab
- n) Any other ethnic group
- o) Prefer not to say

6. Do you have any long-term physical or mental health conditions, disabilities or illnesses?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know
- I would prefer not to say

If yes, please tell us more about your condition:

End of call

- Thank you for your time and feedback; without this, we can't change services for the better and it is important to shape services around peoples' experiences etc.
- We will write up our findings into a report and share with the service as an ongoing process.
- We will publish this on the Wessex Cancer Alliance website and what has been done as a result of the feedback received.
- Would you like to be sent a copy of the report?
- End of call give contact details.