

Standard Operating Procedure

Writing outpatient clinic letters

Written by:	Kira Beasley
Approved by:	Clinical Governance Group
Date of Approval:	2nd August 2022
Date of Review: This is the most current document and is to be used until a revised version is available	2nd August 2025

Aim and scope of Standard Operating Procedure

This document outlines best practice for writing outpatient clinic letters directly to patients with a copy sent to the General Practitioner; this is endorsed by the Academy of Royal Colleges as best practice.

Target Staff Categories

Medical and Dental
 Nursing and Midwifery

Key amendments to this Standard Operating Procedure

Date	Amendment	Approved by:

Background

The purpose of the outpatient letter.

The outpatient letter should do three main things:

- Record relevant facts about the patients' health and wellbeing
- Present information in a way that improves understanding
- Communicate a management plan to the patient and GP.

These are best achieved by a well-structured, informative, easy to read and engaging letter.

Outpatient clinic letters should meet the standards for outpatient letters set by the Professional Record Standards Body (PRSB) (**appendix 1**) Letters should be used to enhance or expand on information shared during the outpatient consultation.

Clinic letters should not be used to break upsetting or difficult news that is best discussed directly with the patient (phone or face to face).

Writing letters directly to patients is in keeping with Good Medical Practice, which states:

'You must give patients the information they want or need to know in a way then can understand'

Writing directly to patients ensures they feel more involved and informed about their diagnosis, prevention and individual care plan / treatment options. This also ensures that our care is more patient-centred. (appendix 2)

General Guidance for letters

- Use plain English – avoiding medical jargon where possible.
- Explain any medical terminology
- Explain any acronyms
- Use English instead of Latin when writing a medication list
- Highlight changes in medication in **BOLD**
- If including results of tests; explain their significance
- For children and young people, include information that is appropriate for their age & development
- If the patient has visual impairment, ask if a large print would help; at least 16 point is recommended.

Clinicians should consider how formally or directly the information needs to be presented and their relationship with the patient.

Potentially sensitive information can be softened by using a more distant or non-committal style.

Clinic letters should not be used to communicate bad news or potentially unexpected of upsetting results unless previously discussed over the phone or in another appointment.

Consent and Confidentiality

During the clinic appointment, ask the patients verbal permission to write to them and send a copy to their GP. If a patient does not want a letter; write to the patients GP. Document this in the letter and the outpatient notes.

Children under the age of 16 years can give their own permission to be treated if they are believed to fully understand and appreciate what is involved in the treatment. Where it is judged they do not have capacity; write to the patients Parent / Guardian.

Young people ages 16 & 17 are considered to have the capacity to decide their own medical treatment, unless there is significant evidence to suggest otherwise.

Therefore, letters should be addressed to the patient.

For adults who lack capacity; write to the GP and copy the letter to carers / relatives as appropriate.

Letters should not be sent electronically without consent from the patient.

Content for inclusion

Patient demographics

GP Practice details

Diagnosis or suspected diagnosis (if no diagnosis; detail of the condition)

Known Allergies

Medication Changes

Action for GP

Action for Acute Clinician

Summary of the appointment including results of examination and next steps.

A template letter is available in appendix 3.

Appendices.

Appendix 1:

PRSB Guidance



PRSB Guidance
Outpatient-Letters-v.

Appendix 2:

Royal College Guidance



Please_write_to_me
_Guidance_010918.p

Appendix 3: Template letter.



Template Bluespier
letter.docx