
Copying letters to patients

Chelsea and Sutton

Patient information



What does 'copying letters' mean?

'Copying letters to patients' allows you to choose to receive written copies of all correspondence following a hospital outpatient visit or inpatient stay. We hope that sharing these letters will help to improve communication between you and your health professionals.

This means that letters written about you from one health professional to another will be copied to you. We hope that this will help improve your understanding of the care you are receiving at The Royal Marsden.

What do we mean by a letter?

A letter includes communications between different health professionals, for instance, GPs, hospital doctors, nurses, therapists and other health professionals. Different types of letters include:

- Letters to GPs and other community-based health professionals following an inpatient stay in hospital or an outpatient consultation or course of treatment.
- Letters from NHS health professionals to other agencies (such as Social Services or housing, employers or insurance companies). These will only be sent with your written consent.

All the information in these letters should already have been discussed with you. However, it is important to remember that these letters provide other health professionals with clinical information about your treatment and care. Therefore, you may find that some of the language includes clinical terms.

Will I receive a copy of all letters written about me?

Yes, unless:

- The consultant or therapist feels that it is not in your interests to receive the information contained in the letter (your doctor will discuss this with you).
- The letter contains information from or about a third party who has not consented.
- It is in your interests that a letter is sent to another consultant or therapist before anything has been discussed with you. Arrangements should be made to send a copy of this letter to you once its contents have been discussed with you.

Do I have to have a copy of my letters?

No. You may decide that you already have the information or you may prefer not to have a copy.

What do I have to do to receive copies of letters?

At registration you will be asked whether you wish to receive copies of letters written about you by health professionals.

Once you have given your agreement, you will receive copies of letters from this point onwards and throughout your treatment.

Can I change my mind about receiving copies of letters?

Yes. You can change your mind at any time without having to give a reason. You may decide at a later date that you do not want to receive copies of letters. Or you may wish to receive letters if you originally decided that you did not want to be given copies. If you want to change your mind or you are unsure, please talk to your doctor or nurse.

How will I receive copies of letters?

- You will be sent a copy through the post. Please let us know if you change your name, address, telephone number or family doctor.
- You can nominate another person to receive your copies instead of you. You will need to complete their details on a third party consent form.

Please talk to your doctor or nurse if you would like to receive the information in the letter in a different format. For example, if you have a sight impairment.

Will I receive past copies of letters or scans?

‘Copying letters’ does not include back copies of correspondence and does not include any x-rays or scans - at present it is only for letter correspondence.

Copies of past medical records can be obtained through our Access to Health Records Officer.

Further information on how to do this can be found in the booklet *Your guide to The Royal Marsden*.

As a carer, can I receive copies of letters?

Yes. Providing we have the written consent of the patient, we can send you copies of letters.

My child is the patient so who will receive copies of the letters?

Young people aged sixteen and seventeen years of age will be asked for their agreement to receive copies of letters about them. With younger children, we will discuss with the family as to whether the letter will be copied to the child or their parent.

Once a young person reaches the age of 18 they will be contacted to see if any details should be changed.

Who can I talk to if I have questions about a letter I receive?

If you wish to discuss the contents of a letter, please contact the secretary via their direct line on the top of the letter. The name of the consultant will be written on the bottom of the letter.

References

This leaflet is evidence based wherever the appropriate evidence is available, and represents an accumulation of expert opinion and professional interpretation.

Details of the references used in writing this leaflet are available on request from:

The Royal Marsden Help Centre

Freephone: 0800 783 7176

Email: patientcentre@rmh.nhs.uk

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Should you require information in an alternative format, please contact The Royal Marsden Help Centre.

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