

SELF ADVOCACY IN HEALTH CARE: REFERRALS

The healthcare system is complex – this means that despite everyone’s best efforts, sometimes things will happen (like a technology glitch where a fax doesn’t go through) that could slow down or stall a referral to a specialist. Understanding how the referral process works and taking steps to self-advocate can help you to catch these potential mistakes and keep your referral moving forward.

Generally speaking, there are three main steps in a referral process:

1. Speak with your primary care provider about the referral or service you need,
2. Primary care provider sends referral (and referral package if needed) to the specialist (or centralized waitlist),
3. Specialist’s office (or centralized waitlist) will contact either you or your primary care provider with appointment details.

Here are some tips to help your referral move forward smoothly:

- ▼ Confirm the following with your primary care provider’s office:
 - Has the referral been sent?
 - What is the name of the clinic and physician I was referred to?
 - What is the clinic’s contact information?
 - Did you receive a confirmation that the referral was received?
 - Was a timeline provided for when I could expect to hear from the clinic?
 - Is there anything I need to do before my appointment with the clinic?
- ▼ Contact the specialist’s office (or centralized waitlist) and ask about the following:
 - Tip: Have your PHN ready before you call.
 - Was the referral received?
 - Was the referral complete or is anything missing?
 - Is there anything I need to do while I wait to hear about an appointment?
 - Is there a timeframe in which I could expect to hear from you by?

For more information, please visit transcarebc.ca

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- ▼ Here are some other ways you can advocate for yourself:
 - ▼ If your contact information changes, contact the clinic(s) you were referred to and update them.
 - ▼ If a timeframe is given:
 - Put a reminder in your calendar
 - If that time passes and you haven't heard from the clinic, call and request an update for wait times
 - Repeat if needed
 - ▼ If timeframe is not given:
 - Ask if they can estimate a timeframe
 - If they are not able to, choose a timeframe that works for you to follow up (ie: 3 months)
 - Put a reminder in your calendar to call and check back about an appointment or wait times
 - ▼ If you leave a message but don't hear back
 - It is not uncommon for clinics to have a slow turn-around time for phone or email messages
 - Speak slowly and leave a message with your name (and the name on your BC Services Card if different), date of birth, PHN and phone number, with your request
 - If you do not hear back in 3-5 business days, try calling again
 - ▼ If you have difficulty following up with the office or if the office does not accept calls to check on referral status:
 - Ask your primary care provider for help with following up

For tips on how to communicate your needs and requests, check out Trans Rights BC's 'Self Advocacy Guide': transrightsbc.ca

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