



## St John's Institute of Dermatology Skin Cancer Services

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# About the rapid access skin assessment clinic

**You have been referred to the Rapid Access Skin Assessment Clinic for assessment or treatment of a skin lesion. Our priority is to confirm or exclude a diagnosis of skin cancer. This leaflet provides information about the clinic and how it runs.**

### About the rapid access skin assessment clinic

The clinic aims to provide prompt diagnosis and treatment to patients with new or changing skin lesions that may be a skin cancer. The clinic has a team of health care professionals including dermatologists (skin specialists), dermatologic surgeons (skin specialists trained in skin surgery), dermatopathologists (pathologists who specialise in diagnosing skin conditions) and clinical nurse specialists. There is also a team of outpatient nurses available to help you during your clinic visit.

Please do not hesitate to ask us any questions you may have about your skin and why you have been referred to the clinic.

### How do I get an appointment in the clinic?

You can only be referred to the clinic by your GP. Unfortunately patients without an appointment cannot be seen. If you are ever concerned about a skin lesion, report it promptly to your GP. Your doctor will assess you and, if required, can refer you on to a specialist clinic such as this one.

### How long will I wait to get an appointment?

We aim to provide rapid access to our clinic for patients with suspected skin cancer by seeing all urgent GP referrals within two weeks and all non-urgent referrals within six to eight weeks. We try to match the number of doctors in clinic to the number of patients attending clinic to minimise delays. However, because our goal is to see all urgent referrals within two weeks, our clinics are sometimes overbooked. We apologise if you experience any significant delays.

## What will happen in the clinic?

When the doctor is ready to see you, a nurse will ask you to come into the consultation room. You will usually have been referred because there is a concern about a single lesion but as part of our screening service we offer all patients a full skin check. If you would like a full skin check the doctor or nurse will ask you to undress so the doctor can examine all of your skin. If you would prefer a limited examination or wish for an additional member of staff to be present, please inform the nurse or doctor.

## How will you make a diagnosis?

Sometimes we make a diagnosis just by examining your skin, but we often need to take a sample (skin biopsy) to make an accurate diagnosis. A skin biopsy is carried out under local anaesthetic and often requires stitches. If the doctor seeing you thinks that you need a diagnostic biopsy or skin surgery to treat a lesion, we aim to offer this procedure on the same day as your appointment, if it is convenient for you. Occasionally we cannot offer an appointment for surgery on the same day so we will offer you an appointment to have your procedure at the earliest available date.

## How long will I wait to be seen in the clinic?

We prefer to offer any biopsies and treatment on the same day because it means that you do not have to come back to the hospital at a later date. The demand for the clinic and for biopsies is higher on certain days than on others which can mean there is a wait to see a doctor or for a biopsy. We will try to see you as quickly as possible and we apologise if you do experience delays. If you do not feel you can wait to have a biopsy (if required) please tell the doctor seeing you and they will arrange for it to be done on another day.

## What lesions do you biopsy or treat?

We biopsy any lesion for which it is not possible to make a clinical diagnosis by only examining your skin. We treat all skin cancers and pre-cancerous lesions. We are not permitted to treat benign (non-cancerous) skin lesions.

## Will I be given a follow-up appointment?

We aim to diagnose and treat patients on the day of their first appointment, wherever possible, and so the majority of our patients are not given a follow-up appointment. If you have had skin surgery we are likely to contact you at a later date to offer a follow-up appointment. It is important that you leave us with an **accurate day time telephone number** as we may need to contact you at short notice to offer you a follow up appointment.

## I have had a surgical procedure – what happens next?

The result of your biopsy will come back to your hospital doctor, who will then decide what follow-up is required. You will either be sent a letter or phoned by one of our administrative team to let you know when we would like you to come back. This will normally be two to four weeks after your first procedure. Please try to attend any follow-up appointment offered, as our slots are always in demand. If you are unable to keep the appointment, please ring the administration team to reschedule your appointment.

## Can I get my result by telephone?

We do not usually provide results by telephone. If you are offered an appointment by telephone, please do not ask the caller about your biopsy result. The person calling will be an administrator who has been asked to book your appointment by a doctor. The caller will not have been told the result of your biopsy or why you need to come back for follow-up.

## I've been offered a follow-up appointment – what does that mean?

Do not be concerned if you are offered a follow-up appointment. Many patients who have had skin surgery are offered follow-up appointments. This may be because the doctor wishes to discuss the findings with you, wishes to reassess your skin, or would like to do further tests or to offer further treatment. We try not to offer unnecessary appointments – if you are offered an appointment it is because the doctor feels it is important to see you again.

## What do I do if I haven't been contacted about my follow-up arrangements?

We expect that all our patients will have been informed about follow-up plans within four weeks of their procedure.

If you have not heard anything **after four weeks**, please contact your clinical nurse specialist - either Serhiy Aleksyeyenko on 020 7188 7188 (extension 51862) or Erin Mewton (extension 52518). You can also contact the clinical nurse specialists via the paging system between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday. Please telephone 0844 822 2888 and give the operator pager number 846132 for Erin or 957923 for Serhiy. Once you have given the pager number, you will be asked to leave a message. Please give your name, your hospital number and telephone number and you will be contacted as soon as possible.

## Further information



**Dimbleby Cancer Care** is the cancer support service for Guy's and St Thomas'. They have drop-in information centres, and also offer complementary therapies, psychological support and benefits advice.

Drop-in information centres are located at Guy's in Oncology Outpatients (Ground floor, Tabard Annexe) and at St Thomas' on the Lower Ground Floor, Lambeth Wing.

**t:** 020 7188 5918 **e:** RichardDimblebyCentre@gstt.nhs.uk

**British Association of Dermatologists** – Website has patient information on skin diseases and treatments: **w:** [www.bad.org.uk](http://www.bad.org.uk)

**PALS** – To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). Ask a member of staff to direct you to PALS or:  
**t:** 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas' **t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy's **e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)

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