

## Karing Chronicle

### Getting referred to Hospital

Many of you will have seen some scare stories in the press about an incentive scheme which may appear to encourage practices not to refer patients to hospital, so I want to start this article by saying

#### **All Patients who need a referral to hospital will be referred**

For most of my career in the Health service, the work of General Practice has been measured by counting numbers – the quantity of work we do. The incentive schemes which now operate in the Torbay Care Trust - and throughout the country - are intended to measure our success in terms of the quality of the service.

Of course quality is very difficult to measure and results in a spread of targets which act as a proxy for a quality service.

For instance, rather than just measure the absolute number of referrals, we should measure whether they go to the right place, have the right tests done, and achieve the best outcome for the patient. The incentive schemes in place are designed primarily to measure this activity, and as a by product will result in fewer *unnecessary* referrals.

Patients at Pembroke House should notice shorter waiting times for their hospital appointments as a result of this, and find that the end point of the referral is reached more quickly and efficiently as a result of our work. We now use a system of electronic referrals (Choose and Book) where we can

either book your appointment directly in the surgery, or at least give you the phone number to arrange your appointment time to suit yourself.

Many referrals are simply a route into the hospital to arrange services (e.g footwear, or some scans) and if we can find a way of doing this without using up a referral, then it is right we should do it.

These pathways through the system are constantly being adapted, and need the analysis and feedback from practices to refine the process. Some of the incentive scheme measures and rewards the time taken to do this.

In fact referrals into the hospital system, both for emergency and for planned work have increased considerably this year, and work is going on to explore this increase.

No-one who doesn't need to, wants to go to hospital so our work is designed to put people in the right place at the right time

