Sent via email

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Dear Colleague,

Orthodontic Referrals

This letter is being sent under clause 260/261 of your GDS Contract/PDS Agreement as referral guidance. Please ensure all current Performers are aware of the contents and incorporate this into your practice referral policy so that new Performers will also be aware.

In order to assist the orthodontic referral process, and to ensure the best possible orthodontic outcomes, we are enclosing some helpful guidance on assessing and managing patients with malocclusions who may benefit from orthodontic treatment. NHS funding is only available for patients with the most severe malocclusions who fall into categories 4 and 5 using the Index of Orthodontic Treatment Need (IOTN) or category 3 if they also have a severe aesthetic problem (above grade 6 on the aesthetic component). Not all dentists are familiar with using IOTN so we have attached a simple eligibility guide which should assist you in making the decision to refer or not. There is also an excellent app developed by the British Orthodontic Society which you can download for free to assist with making the correct IOTN assessment (Easy IOTN).

A referral should not be made at patient or parent/guardian request where the referring GDP knows the patient will not meet the NHS eligibility criteria and instead the GDP should discuss with the patient and parent/guardian the reasons why a referral is inappropriate and cannot be made.

Eligible patients and their parent/guardian must be advised that the NHS will only fund one course of orthodontic treatment, except where a patient has undergone interceptive treatment and they have worn retainers as directed but their IOTN remains 3.6 or greater at the time the child is ready to commence definitive orthodontic treatment. It is essential to ensure that patients and their parent/guardian are aware of this and that once they have commenced treatment they will not be able to change

orthodontists to receive another funded course of treatment (where patients move and the distance to the original practice is unreasonable when considering the amount of treatment remaining, completion of care at a closer practice may be arranged) and that if they stop treatment before it is completed they will not be able to have a further course of treatment at a later date.

It is essential that any patient embarking on orthodontic treatment has excellent dental health (no active caries/periodontal disease unless the referral is for advice on extractions only) and excellent oral hygiene (plaque score of less than 10%). Orthodontic treatment can be lengthy and requires excellent cooperation and commitment. The vast majority of patients completing orthodontic treatment with fixed braces will be advised to wear their retainers lifelong if they wish to maintain the results of their treatment. The cost of replacement retainers after the 12 month NHS supervision period must be borne by the patient/parent/guardian regardless of age or exemption status. It is important that patients and their parents/guardians are aware of the considerable time and long-term financial commitment they need to make when they embark on a course of orthodontic treatment. They will be asked to sign a Patient/Orthodontist Partnership Contract before they can start treatment and a copy of this is enclosed for your information. Please discuss this with your patient to ensure they understand the commitments before you make the referral.
All referrals must be made on the Dental Electronic Referral System (DERS) which lists all practices that are accepting referrals at the time. The list will be in the order of distance from the patient's home and will detail waiting time for assessment and waiting time to start treatment following assessment. The parent/guardian must be given the choice of practices listed in DERS as well as waiting times so they can choose which practice to be referred to. Multiple referrals should not be made and the parent/guardian should choose one practice only. If a parent/guardian subsequently changes their mind which practice they wish to be referred to, you should go into the original referral and amend this by selecting a new practice and press send again; the original practice will need to be phoned to advise the patient should be removed from their waiting list as being on more than one artificially inflates waiting lists.

Yours sincerely

Nick Hanmore
Dental Commissioning Manager