



**NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR
MEDICAL ASSOCIATION**



NLMA Guidance:

**Responsibility for notifying patients
about a specialist appointment**

The following advice is provided in response to questions from NLMA members. This guideline is based on consultations and dialogue with members, including a Focus Group of family physicians and specialists, and, where relevant, interpretation of the MCP Preamble. These guidelines are suggested for use in private offices and are not a substitute for the policies of regional health authorities or the aforementioned organizations.

This guidance is based on the principle that effective communication between referring and consulting physicians and their staff is essential to the quality and safety of patient care. Professional communication between physicians should always serve the best interest of patients and should be respectful, collegial and collaborative.

Responsibility for notifying patients about a specialist appointment

The following motion was passed at the 2017 NLMA Annual General Meeting – ***“That the NLMA work with family physicians and other specialists to ensure that administrative tasks, such as advising patients of an appointment with a specialist, are appropriately managed by the specialist’s administrative staff and not transferred to the staff of family physicians.”***

1. Throughout the NLMA’s consultations it was observed that most specialists and RHAs take responsibility for contacting the patient for an appointment after a referral is received from a family physician. Therefore, the NLMA advises physicians that after a referral is made it is the responsibility of the specialist’s office to advise patients regarding their appointment time and location. The NLMA also recommends that RHAs perform this function for specialists who hold clinics within RHA facilities. [The NLMA recognizes, that within RHAs there may be exceptions. For instance, in the case of an adolescent patient who is considered to be competent to give consent, it may be more appropriate for the RHA to provide the appointment details to the family physician’s office to communicate to the patient.]
2. To carry out this function, specialists’ offices should be able to rely upon the completeness and accuracy of patient contact information. Therefore, when writing a request for a referral, the family physician’s office must ensure that accurate contact information for the patient is provided, including the address and telephone number, basic demographic information, and the patient’s MCP number. [As physicians’ offices integrate with EMR, patient email and cell phone information should be included, when available, to facilitate electronic notification.]
3. Informing the patient is the ultimate goal in this process, and professional collaboration may be needed to accomplish this end. For example, if a specialist’s office has attempted, but is unable to contact the patient with their appointment time, the family physician’s office may need to be of assistance in contacting the patient.