Indefinite referrals—what you need to know

Referrals from a general practitioner (GP) are valid for 12 months, unless stated differently on the referral letter/note. For example, a referral could be valid for three, six or 18 months, or be indefinite.

A GP may write an indefinite referral for a chronically ill patient who is in the continuing care and management of a specialist or consultant physician for a specific condition (e.g. glaucoma).

Referrals from specialists and consultant physicians are valid for three months unless the referred patient is an admitted patient. The referral for admitted patients is valid for three months, or the duration of the admission, whichever is the longer.

When does a patient need a new referral?

Where an indefinite referral exists, a specialist or consultant physician shouldn’t request, and a GP shouldn’t issue, a new referral unless a new condition has developed.

For example, a patient regularly reviewed for glaucoma will need a new referral if they’ve developed a pterygium and need surgery. An initial attendance item for the new referral would be payable.

Billing information

The renewal of a referral (e.g. where it has expired after 12 months) for the same condition doesn’t mean a specialist or consultant physician can bill another initial consultation. The renewal of a referral is to make sure Medicare benefits are paid at specialist or consultant referred rates, rather than at unreferred rates.

For more information

Call 132 150*

Online mbsonline.gov.au

Email askMBS@humanservices.gov.au

Access to other education resources humanservices.gov.au/healthprofessionals then Doing business with Medicare > Online education services

*Call charges apply.

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