

Understanding the healthcare system

We have an excellent healthcare system in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Many services and treatments can be offered locally in your closest hospital, but some more specialised services will only be available at larger big city hospitals. This can make navigating the system more challenging.

KEEPING TRACK

You are an important part of the healthcare team making decisions and coordinating you or your child's care.

Although the medical or surgical teams will coordinate your care and communicate with different hospital departments, it is important that you also keep track of who you have seen and what investigations have been ordered for you. If you have appointments close together sometimes your information has not been updated when you see the next specialist. If you can keep track of you or your child's own information, this will help ensure everyone caring for you is up to date.

All information is sent to your General Practitioner (GP) who is an excellent source of knowledge and can provide an all encompassing view of your healthcare needs. Some hospital departments have a clinical nurse specialist (CNS) who is an expert in their area and can help with coordinating your care and keeping you in the loop. All departments have an administrative team you can contact that can clarify appointments or waitlist times for you – ask for this contact during your appointment.

WHAT TO EXPECT AT YOUR APPOINTMENT

Different specialties will run their appointments differently. Most will be with a single specialist. Often the specialist will have a registrar (a fully qualified doctor completing further training in the specialty area) with them. Some hospitals have medical students learning in them and your appointment is a great opportunity for them to learn about your condition if you are happy to have them involved.

Some clinic appointments will be run by a Multi-disciplinary Team (MDT). This type of clinic allows your medical concern to be considered by a team of specialists in one go. This ensures the plan made for you or your child is comprehensive and reduces the number of appointments and travel time for you. It can sometimes be daunting having so many people review you at one time but everyone in the room is there to help you.

Most clinic appointments will involve a conversation about you and your condition. Although the healthcare workers will have a lot of information already from your GP or past hospital notes, it is important that they cover this information with you face to face.

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They may repeat some information that you've told them before to ensure they have a good understanding of your situation. A clinical examination is a normal part of an appointment to assess the physical nature of your condition. You are welcome to ask for a chaperone or support person if required.

The healthcare professionals may use language or terms that you have not heard before. Make sure you ask for clarification as it is easy for healthcare workers to forget that this may be your first time hearing these words. Medical treatment can vary around the world and is tailored to your unique scenario. If what you have researched is different to what you have discussed in your appointment, ask – your doctor will be able to give you an explanation and options.

Don't hesitate to ask for clarification – it's easy for them to forget that this may be your first time hearing these terms.

TRAVEL

Depending on your healthcare needs, you may have appointments at different hospitals around the motu (country). Many people will need to travel to their appointments. This can take some planning to coordinate and can add in some costs. All local hospitals have a travel office that can help you plan your travel and determine your eligibility to cover the costs. Eligibility is dependent on your distance from the treating hospital, your frequency of appointments and if you have a community services card. Check if you qualify here <https://info.health.nz/services-support/support-services/national-travel-assistance>

WHAT TO TAKE TO YOUR APPOINTMENT

Bringing whānau or a friend to your appointment can be helpful, as it can be difficult to remember everything discussed. After your visit, a letter summarising the appointment will be sent to your GP. If you'd like a copy for your records, you can request one. It's also helpful to bring a list of your medications and any allergies, as this information supports your healthcare team in providing the best care for you.

SUMMARY

- Write down questions to ask during your appointment before you go
- Bring a support person to listen – your whānau or a friend
- Ask for the clinic's contact details so you can contact them with queries later