

Audit of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Clinical Letter Writing (Fife)

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Background

In January 2021, the Royal College of Psychiatry (RCPsych) published a report regarding guidance for out-patient letter writing. This audit compares key recommendations in the RCPsych guidance with appointment letters completed by Consultant Psychiatrists in Fife CAMHS in December 2021. The aim of this audit is to highlight differences between the RCPsych guidelines and Consultant letters to improve letter writing in the service.

Methodology

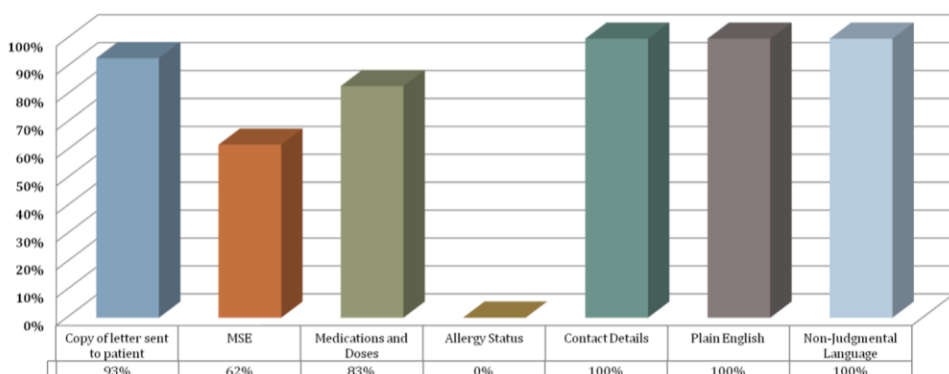
- Data was collected and analysed from 30 appointment letters. 5 randomly selected letters were studied from each of 6 participating Consultant Psychiatrists.
- Key recommendations from RCPsych guidelines were that patients should receive a copy of their clinic letter, either directly or by way of a copy of the GP letter and include the below criteria:

Mental State Examination (MSE)	Medications and dosages	Allergy status
Contact details of psychiatrist's workplace	Written in plain English	Use Non-Judgmental Language

Audit Results

- General findings:
 - 93% aligned with recommendation for the patient to receive a copy of letter, either directly or by way of a copy of the GP letter
 - 62% included a Mental State Examination
 - 83% listed current medications and dosages
 - 0% listed allergy status
 - ALL letters included contact details of psychiatrist's workplace and were written in plain English with non-judgmental language

Key Principles in RCPsych Guidance Compared to Letters



Discussion

- According to Fife CAMHS service staff, there has been an increased importance placed on sending patients a copy of their clinic letters over the past few years which can account for the high alignment in this key principle.
- High rates of plain English and non-judgmental language within clinic letters may be expected as most clinicians were already planning on sending the letter/copy of letter to patients.
- RCPsych guidance offers reasoning why doctors may omit inclusion of MSE in out-patient letter writing as patients may find it difficult to read a description of themselves in an MSE. However, RCPsych guidance authors argue that it is not ethically sound to omit this information, and furthermore, it may become more problematic if patients were to come upon this information at a later stage by requesting their medical notes, which is becoming more common.
- Allergy status inclusion was particularly poor, with no letters including this key principle.

Action Plan

- Following this audit, findings have been discussed at Fife CAMHS meetings to highlight where improvements can be made to align more closely with RCPsych guidance.
- Reaudit to be completed July 2022.
- To analyse letters from different types and grades of clinicians at reaudit.

Acknowledgments

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References

Ball, K. and Burn, W. (2021) 'Writing clinic letters: College guidance on improving engagement with patients', Royal College of Psychiatrists. Available at: <https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/members/supporting-you/writing-clinic-letters> (Accessed: 1 March 2022).