

Patient information on Medical Photography

Introduction

Clinicians can now readily take high quality digital photos of patients and use them to monitor conditions and to show other colleagues. It is particularly helpful to share images with specialists who can use them to help decide how quickly to see a patient in outpatients, and even whether an outpatient appointment is needed at all. Locally colleagues are using photos in a number of areas and particularly in dermatology.

Dermatoscopy

GP Practices now have at least one dermatoscope - special high-quality close-up cameras that can help even further. GPs are encouraged to take three photographs, an overview (eg of your whole arm), a close up (just the skin lesion itself) and a dermatoscopic image.

Below are some examples:

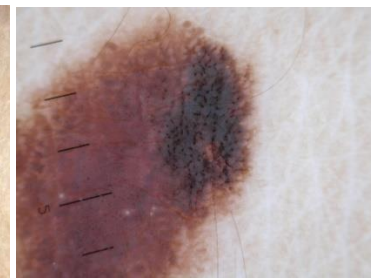
Overview



Close up



Dermatoscopic



How are the photos stored or shared with specialists?

When your GP takes photos of you the photos are stored electronically in your medical records and are transferred securely to specialists via secure internal NHS systems. They are stored as securely and confidentially as all your other medical records are.

What happens next?

Your photographs will be reviewed by a specialist who will either advise your GP how to treat your skin condition or alternatively, if the specialist feels it's necessary, that you are seen face-to-face in an outpatient clinic. You will be offered a hospital appointment. Your GP will normally get an answer from the specialist within 2-3 days.

Where possible we will try to save you a trip to the hospital.

If the lesions look benign (harmless) then they will advise you and your GP not to remove them. Quite often the specialists can advise GPs and nurses in primary care to biopsy or remove suspicious lesions in your local practice rather than going to the hospital. Your GP will usually still send the tissue to the laboratory for further analysis.

Some skin lesions can be treated with topical treatments, such as creams and many can be left alone. The NHS does not remove benign lesions for cosmetic reasons.

Sometimes it isn't possible for the specialist to advise from the photographs so they may opt to see you in outpatients.

How does taking photos help?

Looking at photographs beforehand reduces the time you and other patients will have to wait. It also means that patients who are more likely to have a serious problem can be seen more quickly by specialists if there are more patients being looked after by their GP.

All patients are encouraged to have photos taken where possible. If you feel the area is a sensitive one you can decline to have photos taken.

Please be aware though it may take longer and you may have to go to the hospital to get a diagnosis if your GP does not send in photographs of your lesions.