Head and Neck Two Week Wait (2WW) Clinic

Your doctor has referred you urgently to a specialist ENT clinic in order to assess whether your symptoms are caused by cancer. This type of referral is called a ‘two week wait referral’ because appointments with a specialist are given within two weeks of the GP’s referral. In practice, we try to see people in the next available clinic and this may mean a wait of less than two weeks. It is very important that you attend this appointment.

Why you have been referred?
Identifying and treating cancer early is the best way to improve survival and quality of life. The NHS is trying hard to identify people with cancer earlier. GPs are encouraged to refer people who have symptoms which could be caused by a cancer to hospital quickly for assessment. This means we assess many more people in hospital than in the past. As a result most people who are assessed in this clinic do not have cancer. For most people, their symptoms are caused by something other than cancer.

What will happen in your appointment?
You will be seen by a cancer specialist who will ask questions and examine you. This examination will usually include an examination of your throat with a small endoscope (flexible camera) passed through your nose. This is done without sedation or anaesthetic, but takes only a minute or two and is well tolerated by most people.

For patients with lumps in the neck a needle biopsy may be performed in the clinic. This means passing a fine needle into the lump to get a sample of cells for analysis. The needle is no larger, and often smaller than the ones used for taking blood.

If your symptoms are not caused by a cancer you will be reassured and discharged. The specialist will not have time to discuss your symptoms if they are not cancer related in this clinic. Sometimes advice and treatment may be needed and this may be given by another member of the specialist team. If your symptoms are troublesome, but not caused by cancer your GP may be asked to refer you back to a routine clinic.

Some people will need further tests such as scans or biopsies to help to exclude a cancer. The arrangements will be made in the clinic although will occur on another day.

How does the clinic run?
As we run the clinic every week it is not possible to predict the number of people that need to be seen. We try hard to keep waiting to a minimum but often have to book more than one patient in each slot and so appointment times are approximate. There can be a wait to be seen, although we do make every effort to run the clinic efficiently and assess everyone appropriately. You are welcome to bring someone with you to your appointment.