NHS Lothian

**NHS LOTHIAN, PUBLIC HEALTH AND HEALTH POLICY**

# STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

## Title: Requesting a second opinion from outwith NHS Lothian (including Scottish Boards and England)

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| Approved by: Public Health and Health Policy Senior Management Team | Date Approved: 31.08.26 |
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## Table of Contents

## Purpose

This SOP outlines the procedure NHS Lothian clinicians should follow when seeking a second opinion from outwith NHS Lothian. The overall policy context is the Second Opinion Request Policy NHS Lothian 2026.

## Introduction

The Scottish Government and the General Medical Council support the right to request a second opinion. This is not a legal right but if a clinician thinks that it is in the best interest of the patient to refer for a second opinion, they should do so.

## Scope

This SOP sets out the process which Lothian primary and secondary care clinicians should follow when seeking a second opinion outwith Lothian, for patients who are resident in Lothian. If the patient is being seen in NHS Lothian but is resident elsewhere e.g. NHS Fife, NHS Borders, and the request is for referral to England, then permissions will need to be sought from the patient's health board's Safe Haven team. Contact loth.safehaven@nhs.scot for details.

## Definitions

**NHS Lothian Safe Haven Office:** The team responsible for advising NHS Lothian clinicians on the process for out-of-area referrals and, where required, co-ordinating the funding authorisation process for second opinion referrals to providers outwith NHS Lothian (except for mental health).

The Mental Health Out of Area Group (MOOAG) is the NHS Lothian committee which is responsible for making any out-of-area placements for mental health patients; and would also have governance over any mental health second opinion referral going outwith Lothian.

## Responsibilities

NHS Lothian Clinicians are responsible for gaining clinical approval from their Clinical Director/Associate Medical Director, in writing via email, for a second opinion referral outwith NHS Lothian, as set out in the Policy.

Safe Haven is responsible for advising clinicians about the process and issuing advance funding authorisation for clinically approved second opinion referrals to the NHS in England. Safe Haven records the approval for referrals to England (and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Neurology). Where the second opinion referral is to another NHS Board in Scotland, it is for the NHS Lothian Clinical Service to record the approval.

**Procedure**
(see the relevant section for the type of clinician making the request)

**For hospital consultants (excluding psychiatry and transplant):**

1. The first option should be to request a second opinion from another consultant colleague in NHS Lothian if that is available.
2. The next option, if this is not available, is to request a second opinion from another NHS Board in Scotland. Most second opinion referrals within NHS Scotland do not require separate prior funding authorisation, provided Clinical Director approval has been obtained. However, some services e.g. NHS GGC Neurology, are subject to specific commissioning arrangements or require prior funding authorisation. Safe Haven can advise on any specialty-specific requirements.
3. If no expertise for a second opinion is available within NHS Scotland, NHS Lothian consultants can consider referring to the NHS in England. Please contact NHS Lothian Safe Haven Office for advice on approval and prior funding authorisation. Email loth.safehaven@nhs.scot The usual process for any out-of-area referral to the NHS in England will apply.

For any second opinion referral out-of-area, patients should be made aware that, if proceeding, the referral is for an opinion only and that there should be no expectation of ongoing treatment or care out-of-area. i.e. it is not transfer of care to another provider. Also, it is the case that the other NHS Board or NHS Trust in England is not obliged to accept the referral.

When a patient has obtained a second opinion privately from a clinician in Scotland or England, there is no requirement for the patient to be referred for ongoing NHS care with that clinician.

**For Psychiatry Consultants:** contact loth.mooag@nhs.scot for advice from the NHS Lothian Mental Health Out-of-Area Group (MOOAG).

**For Transplant Consultants:** Please refer to *NHS Scotland – Second Opinion for Transplant Policy, National Services Division, NHS National Services Scotland.* Please route the request via loth.safehaven@nhs.scot

**For General Practitioners:**

1. The first option should be to refer the patient for a second opinion with a different NHS Lothian consultant in the same department/speciality as the patient's first opinion. You can do this in the normal way you would refer, specifying that the patient would like a second opinion with a different consultant.

2. The next option, if the above is not available, is to contact the Clinical Director of the appropriate specialty to ask if a referral can be made to another NHS Board in Scotland. Most second opinion referrals within NHS Scotland do not require separate prior funding authorisation. However, some services are subject to specific commissioning arrangements or require prior funding authorisation. Please contact loth.safehaven@nhs.scot for advice on the requirements for the proposed referral.
3. Second opinions should only be requested from NHS Trusts in England if there is no-one in NHS Scotland who has the appropriate expertise. Requests for referrals to England should be made by the patient's hospital consultant via NHS Lothian Safe Haven office, not by the GP. Contact loth.safehaven@nhs.scot for advice.

For any second opinion referral out-of-area, patients should be aware that, if proceeding, the referral is for an opinion only and that there should be no expectation of ongoing treatment or care out-of-area. i.e. it is not transfer of care to another provider. Also, it is the case that the other NHS Board/Trust is not obliged to accept the referral.

Discussions and decisions should be documented in the patient's clinical record.

**Change History**

| Revision | Date | Changes | Edited By |
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