

# Guideline

## Patient information style guidelines

**Audit standards:**

- 1. Leaflets use appropriate font and font size**
- 2. Leaflets have a document history box**
- 3. Leaflets have appropriate content as set out in the appendix**
- 4. Leaflets have been reviewed by either the Advisory Group for Patient Information or the Trust Reader Panel where produced by the Trust.**

### **1 Scope**

Trust wide.

### **2 Aim**

These guidelines have been developed to assist staff in writing patient information leaflets. They should be read in conjunction with the [policy for patient information](#).

### **3 Writing the information**

#### **3.1 Points to consider before writing the information**

- Plan carefully before you start writing. Use an outline or a mind map so that you know exactly what you will be writing about.
- Consider who the information is for and why you need to produce it.
- Consider the needs of different groups of people when producing patient information.
- Put yourself in the patient's shoes and try to write from their point of view. Try to imagine what kind of questions you would want answered if you had little knowledge of the subject.
- Information should be based on current evidence and give most recent practice and latest phone number.
- Information should be in context with other information given to patients, for example, letters, leaflets and appointments.

### **3.2 Points to consider regarding style and readability of information**

- Organise your information into sections, use headings and sub-headings.
- Use everyday, plain language. Avoid any kind of jargon.
- Keep sentences and paragraphs short, average sentence length should be 15 – 20 words.
- If you use acronyms then make sure they are explained in full when they are first used.
- If you use medical terminology, explain it. 'This is ...' 'This means ...'
- Be patient-friendly and use personal pronouns such as 'we' and 'you'.
- If you need to use language that could sound potentially alarming for example, 'electrodes will be put on your chest' or 'nuclear medicine' – explain why it is being done and what it is.
- Use present and active tenses, where possible, for example, 'your appointment is on...' not 'your appointment has been made for...'
- Never assume that people understand what you are describing – make sure you add explanations and say why things are being done.
- Do not confuse people by covering several treatments and conditions in the same leaflet.

## **4 Structure and content**

### **4.1 Structure**

- Structure your text around 'frequently asked questions' - this makes it easier for patients to read as it is addressing their concerns directly and will also give you a logical structure for your information.

### **4.2 Content**

- Avoid giving instructions like 'you must not' or 'do not' – instead explain why something is necessary.
- Use job titles for local contacts, for example, 'cardiac rehabilitation nurse' rather than a named person as staff will leave the Trust resulting in leaflets becoming out of date.
- Use generic drug names, for example, 'paracetamol' not 'Panadol'.
- Communicate probabilities appropriately; patients often want to know how likely it is that a particular treatment will have a certain positive or negative effect. Avoid using descriptions that have 'few', 'many', 'some' which can mean different things to different people. Fractions and percentages are difficult for some people to understand. Descriptions such as 'one out of every 50' or 'five out of every 100' can mean more to people.
- Be helpful. Help people make decisions by giving them facts about the risks, side effects, benefits and alternatives.

### 5 Checklist for information that should be included

- ✓ Give an explanation of what the information leaflet is about, who it is intended for and what it covers.
- ✓ Include information on the benefits, risks and alternatives.
- ✓ Show that the information is reliable, mark it with the production dates, a review date, a version number and an author/authoring department.
- ✓ State the full address (including box number) of the department, together with the direct dial telephone number and the hospital website – <http://www.cuh.org.uk/>
- ✓ Who can patients contact if they have any more questions?
- ✓ Help people identify further local and national sources of information and support, such as contact numbers and website addresses for further information.
- ✓ Show what reference sources have been used in the production of the information leaflet.
- ✓ Include the statement on how to obtain translations, large print and audio versions.
- ✓ Include the statement on privacy and dignity (if applicable to leaflet content).
- ✓ Ask for comments and suggestions about the patient experience and about the information itself. Supply a contact telephone number and an email address.

**Appendix 1 provides checklists for points that should be included in leaflets about operations/procedures, conditions/treatments, services or medication.**

**Appendix 3 provides a link to the templates for an information leaflet.**

### 6 Style – formatting text

#### 6.1 Layout


- Too much text on a page can be off-putting. Use small blocks of text dividing them up by headings.
- Columns and paragraphs which are too close together can cause confusion.
- Make sure that headings are clear.
- Bulleted or numbered points can help to divide complicated information, but do not use formal report numbering: 1.1, 1.1.1 as this is too detailed for this kind of information. Keep the numbering simple.
- In tabbed lists make sure the punctuation is consistent. Complete sentences in a bullet list should start with a capital and end with a full stop. If you are listing words only or very short phrases following

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a colon, don't use an initial capital and don't use full stops – even at the end.

- When describing steps, use numbers rather than bullet points or flow charts. Flow charts can sometimes be difficult to understand.
- Leave one space after a full stop.
- Left justify text only: 

## 6.2 Format of text

### Grammar

- The Trust style for all documents and letters is open punctuation; this means there are no full stops included in eg, ie or titles – Mr, Dr, Mrs.
- Avoid using eg, ie and etc. Not everyone will understand them, instead use 'for example' or 'such as' and 'in other words' or 'that is'.
- Inpatient and outpatient are written as one word with no hyphen.
- When referring to the 'Trust' use an initial capital.
- Double speech marks are only used when reporting speech – use single marks for everything else.

### Dates/numbers/time

- For dates use day, month, year with no 'th', 'rd', 'st' following the day.
- Numbers from one to nine are easier to read if they are written in words and write numbers from '10' upwards as numbers.
- Time should follow the 24 hour clock.
- STD phone codes should not have brackets around them and should not have a dash between the code and the number

### Font

- We recommend you use **Verdana** with a **minimum point size of 11**.
- 14 point Verdana is commonly used in large print books and is also needed for children and older people.
- 16 point Verdana is used by the Royal National Institute for the Blind, for partially sighted people.
- Use **bold** to emphasise text. Avoid UPPER CASE letters, *italics* and underlining as they make the text more difficult to read.
- Use lower case letters, where possible, as this makes text much easier to read. Exceptions to this are proper nouns like days of the week and months of the year, people's titles, organisations, initiatives (for example, Agenda for Change), acts of parliament (for example, the Health and Social Care Act), publications and the first letter in a sentence.

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- If you are referring to the function of a job then use lower case, for example: doctors, nurses, chief executive, cleaners etc.
- If you are referring to someone's title, for example: Gareth Goodier, Chief Executive then use initial capitals. Departments should have initial capitals, for example: the Oncology Centre.
- If you are referring to a department, centre, ward (but ward C6, ward L5 etc), clinic, service, team, office, specialty it should be lower case.
- Titles of books and reports should be in italics (and have initial capitals).

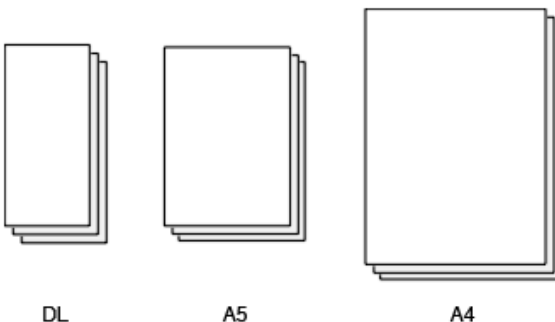
### 6.3 Images/Picture

- Do not use Clip Art or cartoons. They do not add to the reputation of a professional organisation. Use pictures when appropriate and consider whether they will add anything to the information. If you wish to use pictures contact the media studio or use the NSH Photo Library site: <http://www.photolibrary.nhs.uk/>
- Do not write text over background pictures.

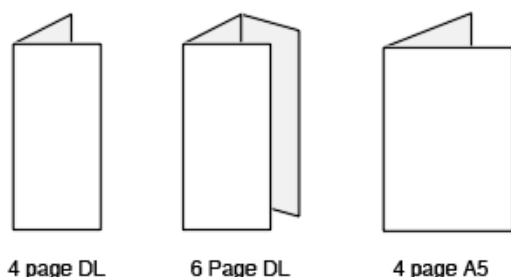
## 7 Formats and colours available

All patient information leaflets are published in A4 format on white paper. However, if it has been agreed that a leaflet may be pre-printed, the following formats are available:

### Separate-sheet leaflets:



### Folded leaflets:



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### Booklets:



8 page DL



8 page A5



8 Page A4

## 8 Consistent features

### Front cover:

- Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust logo
- patient Information logo
- title of leaflet
- department or directorate where appropriate

### Content:

- Aim of leaflet
- benefits
- risks
- alternatives
- contacts/further information
- references/sources of evidence

### Back cover:

- Document history (which includes publication date, review date, version number and unique leaflet reference number)
- translation, large print or audio request text
- no smoking strapline

**The Patient Information template should be used**, which has all these features incorporated into it. The templates can be found at:

<http://connect/index.cfm?articleid=1073>

## 9 Monitoring the compliance with and effectiveness of the guideline

The effectiveness of this guideline is monitored on an ongoing basis by the Patient Information Team.

- **Style, layout and format:** use of a continuous quality assurance process by the Patient Information Team when working with authors on using the leaflet templates and style guidelines when producing and updating patient information. The Trust Reader Panel also

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review each locally produced patient information leaflet and the Advisory Group for Patient Information review each Trustwide patient information leaflet in terms of style, layout, format and readability.

## 10 Further information

- Toolkit for producing patient information Department of Health 2003
- Patient Information Team: Box 132, 01223 216032 (internal: 2032) [patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk)

## Equality and Diversity Statement

This document complies with the Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust service Equality and Diversity statement.

## Disclaimer

It is **your** responsibility to check against the electronic library that this printed out copy is the most recent issue of this document.

## Document management

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