

Hambleton, Richmondshire and Whitby Locality

Open Access Echocardiography Service from South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Key messages for practices

Introduction

- Echocardiography (or cardiac ultrasound) is a key diagnostic procedure in the investigation of cardiac disease. It provides essential information on the structure and function of the heart, enabling direction of evidence-based treatments to those patients who will benefit, across a wide number of cardiac conditions including heart failure, arrhythmias, valvular heart disease and coronary disease.
- A service has been developed in response to feedback from local General Practitioners in the Hambleton and Richmond (H&R) locality. The service will be piloted for a fixed period of 6 months across all practices in the H&R locality. The results will be evaluated to confirm ongoing requirements.
- The Open Access Echocardiography Service will be based at the Friarage Hospital in Northallerton (FHN).

Referral indications

- Whilst for most patients, the echocardiogram forms just part of a broader specialist cardiological assessment, some patients are referred predominantly for an echocardiogram. Where GPs may feel comfortable in interpreting the result and applying to patient management, without the need for Consultant Cardiologist involvement, an open access echocardiography service might be appropriate
- Potential indications include:
 - An asymptomatic patient with a cardiac murmur, where a normal echocardiogram can exclude significant cardiac pathology
 - Evaluation of left ventricular hypertrophy in hypertension
 - Assessment for structural cardiac problems in atrial fibrillation
 - Confirmation of diagnosis in patients with existing heart failure (not new onset)

Possible exceptions

- In the main there will be no restrictions on who can be referred into the service, but it is suggested that the following may be better directed into a consultant out-patient clinic (these patients are likely to need cardiologist review whatever the results of the echocardiogram):

(a) Heart Failure

Historically, OAE has been aimed particularly at patients with possible heart failure, aiming to rapidly identify those patients with left ventricular systolic dysfunction. However, the NYY Heart Failure Pathway, in line with NICE guidance on Chronic Heart Failure (CG108), suggests that those patients with possible heart failure and either a previous MI or an elevated serum BNP should be referred for specialist assessment in addition to echocardiography. Thus logistically, this group of patients may be better served by a “one-stop” evaluation in a consultant-led clinic.

(b) Murmur with symptoms e.g. chest pain

Whilst a normal echocardiogram will exclude significant valvular pathology, such patients may have (for example) underlying coronary disease and thus merit other cardiology investigations. Conversely, should significant pathology be uncovered by the echocardiogram then urgent intervention may be indicated.

(c) Patients with known significant valvular disease.

These individuals should be under specialist cardiologist follow up with regular clinical and echocardiographic review

(d) Screening for cardiomyopathy eg HCM

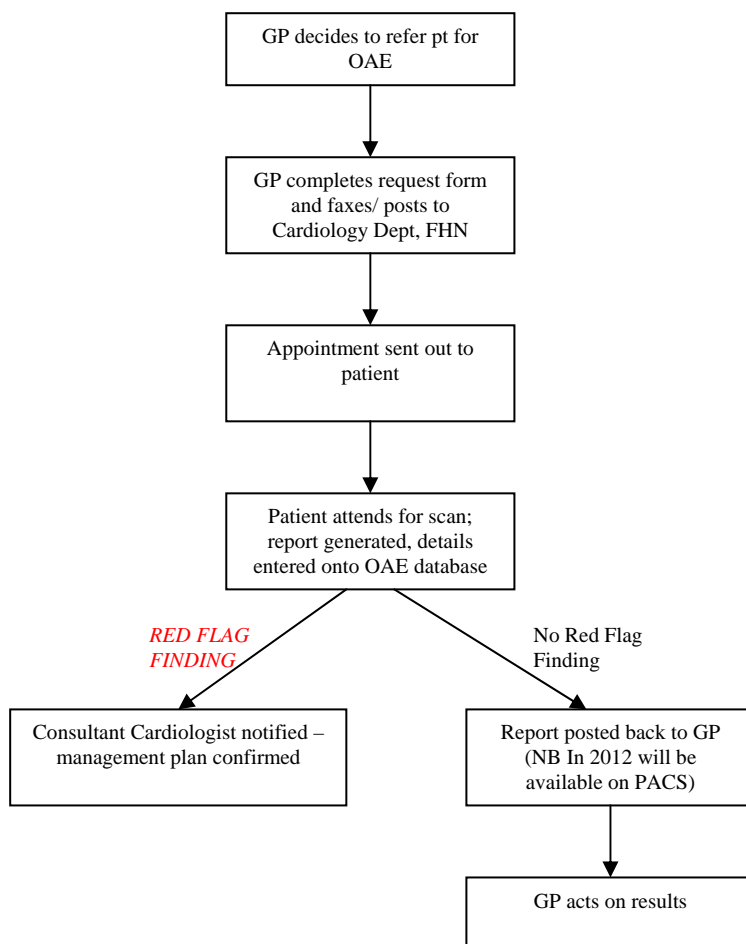
This needs more than just echocardiography (a normal echocardiogram may be falsely reassuring) with a formal family history, clinical evaluation, interpretation of ECG etc, and thus is best performed in a specialist cardiology (or genetics) clinic.

- Echocardiography should not be requested for non-specific symptoms with low likelihood of cardiac disease (eg dizzy spells with normal ECG and examination, atypical chest pain).

Service access and delivery

- The referral proforma and patient pathway are attached below.
- The scans will be performed by British Society of Echocardiography-accredited sonographers, who will perform a full echocardiographic study (according to national guidelines) and provide a full technical report, with some guidance on the clinical relevance of the findings.
- Should significant cardiac pathology be found then this will generate a recommendation that referral for specialist cardiology opinion is considered.
- Certain “red-flag” findings (e.g. severe LV systolic dysfunction, severe aortic stenosis, cardiac mass/ thrombus) will generate an automatic review by a consultant cardiologist.
- Outwith these red-flag diagnoses, the responsibility for interpreting and acting upon the results of the scan will remain with the requesting primary care practitioner.

Open access echocardiography Patient Pathway:



Division of Cardiothoracic Services
Open Access Echocardiography Referral Form

Patient Details

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone No: _____

GP Details

Referral Date: _____

Referred by: _____

GP Practice/ Stamp:

Reason for referral:

What specific question should the examination answer?:

Relevant Medical History:

Previous echo?: Y N

Details: _____

ECG:
Findings: _____

If Open Access Echocardiography service hadn't been available, would you have referred to a Cardiology Clinic? Y N

Queries can be directed by email to
Dr Richard Graham (Richard.graham@stees.nhs.uk) Secretary 01609 763931