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An audit of the standard of orthodontic referrals to the Orthodontic departments at East Lancashire Trust Hospitals

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Background: Orthodontic referrals are the means by which a General Dental Practitioner (GDP) can communicate with an Orthodontist for advice or treatment of malocclusion. Thousands of referrals are made each year in the UK. The British Orthodontic Society produces national guidance on how to refer, and provide tips for general dental practitioners on what to include.

Objectives: The main objective of the present study is to identify information which is missing in orthodontic referrals, to improve patient care through an appropriately informed referral service; and to allow benchmarking against other providers in primary and secondary care.

Design: Criterion based retrospective audit.

Setting: East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust, between March 2018 and December 2018.

Gold Standard: 80% of referrals would contain 100% of referral criteria.

Method: Data was identified from new patient clinics.

Results: Twenty percent (14/69) GDP referrals contained all information required, 85% of referrals contained at least five out of the eight referral criteria points, 51% (35/69) of referrals did not include relevant radiographs, 41% (28/69) of referrals had stated whether or not orthodontic treatment had been carried out previously, and 70% (48/69) of referrals were accepted even though 20% (14/65) contained a completed referral letter.

Recommendations: Disseminate information required in a referral to respective practices identified as not meeting 80% standard, highlight the commonly missing areas and their importance, dissemination through; email, letter, professional journals, IOTN app, incorporate into CPD, and introduction of a new referral proforma, an electronic copy may be sent out to all practices