

WHY HAVE I BEEN REFERRED TO THE HCV CLINIC?

Your doctor has referred you to the specialists at the Hepatitis C Clinic because he or she must feel that your medical condition needs further investigation and expert care.

Once your doctor has sent your referral information to the specialist clinic, the hospital will make an appointment for you and the appointment time will be sent directly to you. Sometimes waiting lists for appointments to Hepatitis C Clinics are long (12 to 18 months or more) and it may be quite a while until your appointment date. Remember you have been referred to a specialist clinic because the specialist has the skills, equipment and services to assess your liver health and treat your hepatitis C. While you may be worried that you need to be seen straight away, it is important to remember that hepatitis C is generally a very slowly progressing disease. Just because you have been referred to a specialist's clinic does not mean that your health is poor or you might die if you are not seen immediately. If this were the case, your doctor would send you directly to hospital.

In the meantime, you and your doctor can discuss some things to relieve symptoms if you have them or some simple strategies to maintain a good level of health. Good eating and exercise are important for everyone's health maintenance.

This visit to the Specialist may be your first opportunity to speak with someone who has a lot of knowledge about your

condition. Use this chance to find out what you want to know about hepatitis C, how it is affecting your health and to discuss treatment options. A good idea is to bring along a list of questions - say five of the most important that you would like answered. Some people find it useful to bring along a partner or significant other to discuss what you have been told.

What can I expect at my first visit?

First visits at the clinic are often an opportunity for the specialist to gain an understanding of your condition.

The specialist that you see will want to obtain a full "history" or story about when and where the condition began and how it affects your health. They may also want to know information about other areas of your life so that they may have a clear picture of you as a person. This information is important to know so that they may understand how your condition impacts on your life and how you may cope with treatment.

After the initial discussion the specialist will probably wish to examine you. He or she will examine your abdomen and look for any obvious signs of liver disease, which can sometimes show on the skin. They may take your blood pressure and perform some other physical examinations. You may be sent for some blood tests but will not be having any tests on this day that you need to starve for or that will leave you drowsy.

WHY HAVE I BEEN REFERRED TO THE HCV CLINIC?

At your first visit some of the things your specialist doctor might do:

- Conduct a thorough medical examination – including ask about your medical history, and a physical examination
- Find out what you know about hepatitis C
- Review your blood tests and order others test if necessary
- Discuss your hepatitis C treatment options
- Discuss liver biopsy and what it entails
- Discuss what hepatitis C treatment involves
- Find out how you think you will cope having hepatitis C treatment
- Give you time to think about your options

The doctor will not:

- Commence you on treatment
- Conduct a liver biopsy
- Assume that you want treatment immediately

Sometimes it is not possible for your doctor to answer all of your questions until further investigations are carried out. The first visit is the beginning of the process of finding out more about you and your health and managing your condition.

After the visit the Specialist in HCV will usually write a letter back to your doctor explaining what took place, what the Specialist's impressions are and what he or she plans to do from here.

If you have queries or concerns either before you attend the hepatitis C clinic or after a visit you can discuss these concerns with your GP or contact the Hepatitis C Council of Queensland on 3236 0610 or 1800 648 491. They will not be able to tell you about the condition of your liver but they can answer questions that you may have.