

## Clarification on Referral Requirements

Unlike X-ray procedures, which involve ionising radiation and are subject to strict regulations necessitating formal referrals, ultrasound examinations do not emit ionising radiation. Consequently, the legal and regulatory frameworks governing ultrasound differ.

According to the *Guidelines for Professional Ultrasound Practice* by the Society and College of Radiographers (SCoR) and the British Medical Ultrasound Society (BMUS), there is no legal requirement for a GP referral to perform an ultrasound scan. Self-referrals, electronic referrals, or referrals from other approved healthcare professionals are all permissible, provided specific conditions are met. The guidelines emphasise:

*"If self-referrals are accepted by the department or provider, the circumstances when this may occur should be recorded within the local requesting protocols."*

(BMUS Guidelines)

## Legal Requirements to Perform an Ultrasound Scan

For an ultrasound scan to be legally and ethically performed, the following conditions must be met:

1. **A Medical Question:** There needs to be a medical question or reason to justify the scan. This can range from investigating a clinical concern to offering reassurance to a patient that no abnormalities are present.
2. **Patient Consent:** Informed patient consent must be obtained before conducting the scan.
3. **Referral Form Requirements:** There are no specific legal requirements regarding the content of a referral form other than the inclusion of:
  - **A Medical Question:**
  - **A Patient Identifier:** Sufficient information to accurately identify the patient. A single unique identifier is sufficient.

These principles align with the SCoR and BMUS guidance, ensuring patient safety and professional accountability.

## In the Patient's Best Interest

As healthcare professionals, our primary focus should always be the well-being of the patient. While referral forms may sometimes lack clarity, we encourage all sonographers to do their utmost to interpret and address the medical question, even if it is not immediately clear. If the query appears ambiguous, consider whether proceeding with the scan could still provide valuable reassurance or exclude significant pathology.

Ultrasound scanning is unique in that it poses no harmful effects to patients, and as such, erring on the side of performing a scan—when consent is given and a clinical question exists—is often in the patient’s best interest. Rejecting scans due to unclear referral details may inadvertently delay care and cause unnecessary distress.

### **Implications for Practice**

As a company we want to accept any format of referral form that meets the above requirements. As the industry embraces electronic referrals (Devon are currently changing over to an all digital referral system) and self-referrals, it is important for us to align our practices with national guidelines and adapt to these changes.

By adhering to these guidelines and maintaining a patient-first perspective, we can continue to provide excellent care while upholding the highest professional standards.

**Ratified by Korus Clinical Governance team and Dr Tom Bean**