

Factsheet



A Second Opinion

The aim of this fact sheet is to explain what your options are and how you may obtain a second (or further) opinion on your child's condition, treatment or care should you want to.

You can ask your child's consultant for a second or further opinion (an opinion about your child's health condition from a different doctor). Although you do not have a legal right to a second opinion, a doctor will rarely refuse to refer you for one.

Before requesting a second opinion, it's worth asking your consultant to go over and explain anything you don't understand. If you're unhappy with the diagnosis or would like to consider a different course of treatment, discuss this with them. Your consultant will be happy to explain things and in many cases there may be no need for a second opinion.

Why ask for a second opinion?

There are differing reasons for wanting to seek a second opinion including:

- wanting another cardiologist to confirm the initial diagnosis;
- wanting another cardiologist's opinion on what treatment would be best for your child
- wanting advice from a cardiologist who specialises in your child's condition;
- wanting your child to be operated on by a surgeon who works at a different unit;
- having concerns about some aspect of the care or treatment your child is currently receiving; or
- wanting your child to be treated at a centre that is easier for you to travel to.

Whatever your reason for seeking a second opinion you have the right to find out more information. Often an explanation is all that's required to put your mind at rest and rebuild any lost trust, so don't be frightened to ask.

Your right to a second opinion

Whatever your reason, you are entitled to ask for a second opinion from a cardiologist at another PCU (paediatric cardiology unit) within the UK.

There is no legal obligation for a doctor to agree to your request for a second opinion. However, the British Medical Association (BMA) advises doctors to "respect a patient's wish to obtain a second opinion unless there are justifiable reasons for refusal, for example, that the patient might come to harm as a result."

Consultants often ask for a further opinion from their colleagues when a case is unusually complex or difficult, so this is not an unusual situation.

How to get a second opinion

The two main routes for getting a second opinion are shown below:

- Ask your child's GP to arrange an appointment with a cardiologist at a different paediatric cardiac unit. Your child's GP will usually tell your original cardiologist that you are going to get a second opinion. This is important because the cardiologist giving the second opinion will need to see your child's medical notes.
- Ask your child's cardiologist. Many cardiologists will be happy to help you get a second opinion and will often suggest another cardiologist you can see. Parents are often worried that their child's cardiologist will be insulted or upset by asking for a second opinion. Try to explain as clearly as possible why you would like a second opinion. You should also be aware that many doctors prefer the term further opinion to second opinion. If your cardiologist does not want to agree to your request, you can discuss the situation with your GP.



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The BMA advises doctors that "Such requests for a further opinion should always be handled sensitively and wherever possible dealt with by the consultant rather than any other doctor on the team. The patient should not be made to feel a nuisance or a 'bad patient'."

Before you get a second opinion

If you have concerns about the care your child is receiving, you may want to consider the following steps before asking for a second opinion:

- Raise your concerns with your child's cardiologist or cardiac liaison nurse.
- Contact the hospital's Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). Every hospital has a team like this that can help you with concerns or complaints.

More information

CHF can give you a list of PCU's and put you in touch with families whose children are treated at different units.

Evidence and sources of information for this CHF information sheet can be obtained at: (1) NHS Choices. How do I get a second opinion. London: NHS; 2017. Available at: www.nhs.uk/chq/pages/910.aspx

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