

Referring Patients with Rapidly Deteriorating Conditions for Specialised AAC Assessment



Royal Hospital for
Neuro-disability



What constitutes a rapidly deteriorating condition?

NHSE guidance:

'people with rapidly degeneration conditions can be referred before they meet the specialised services criteria, particularly in terms of speech and hand function. The referrer and specialised service team should be satisfied they are deteriorating at a rate meaning they are likely to meet the criteria within the time a communication aid would be provided. Although this varies, a period of 18 weeks is suggested. It is recognised this is a difficult determination to make, but evidence of how a person has deteriorated prior to referral should be considered. Decisions will be made on individual clinical circumstances'

When to refer to Compass?

Compass are the specialised service for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) in West London for adults who have difficulty communicating using speech.

We generally do not run a waiting list, so can offer an initial assessment within 2-3 weeks of the referral. There is no need to refer early. If patients still have some functional speech and hand function, they are likely to continue speaking or typing on an iPad as these are more intuitive ways to communicate. When we have provided complex equipment too early, it is not often used.

In addition to the NHSE Specialised AAC Service eligibility criteria, there are some additional factors to consider. Complex high-tech AAC use is most successful and effective when:

- The patient has sufficient cognitive skills needed to learn and retain how to use a new device
- There is some reliable and consistent movement that they can use to operate the device e.g. eyes, head, foot etc.

- They can no longer use other methods effectively and so are motivated to use the high-tech AAC device
- They have a consistent support network to help them set up the equipment every day and manage any technical problems
- They have opportunities to communicate during their day
- They are supported by good seating and positioning systems

What information shall I include in the referral?

In your referral, please explain why current AAC methods are not meeting your patient's communication needs. We also need to know about their complex access needs i.e. why they are unable to type messages on a tablet. We screen all referrals and may ask you to provide more information if we are unsure they meet our criteria. Please note you can now securely share video clips of your patient with us (contact us for instructions).

What is my role once Compass are involved?

You know your patient much better than us so your support will be needed throughout the process. We may ask you to:

- Engage in the assessment process by facilitating communication and offering ideas
- Help manage difficult emotions and relationships in the patient's everyday context
- Carry out 'practice' sessions with the patient with trial equipment (if you feel confident to do so)
- Review the patient's progress during the trial period
- Let us know if your patient's needs change