

External Second Opinions in Paediatrics

A Guide for Families



For children and young people with very complex medical needs, obtaining a second opinion can be a helpful way for you and your child's healthcare team to explore any difficult decisions about your child's future treatment.



What is an external second opinion?

This is the process by which you and the team of healthcare professionals caring for your child can ask another specialist healthcare professional from a different organisation for advice about your child's treatment.



How does the process of requesting a second opinion start?

If you feel an external second opinion could be helpful, you can raise this with your child's healthcare team. Alternatively, it may be suggested by your child's doctor.

You and your child can expect to be directly involved in this process from the very beginning. Together with your child's team, you will decide what important questions need to be asked about your child's treatment. Your views and beliefs are very important.

Once you have all agreed on the questions, your child's team will write a referral to the specialist who will give the second opinion.



Sometimes challenging issues are raised during this process. This may be an incredibly difficult time for you and your family, and you may require additional support and help. Your child's healthcare team may be able to provide you with a dedicated family advocate. The advocate may come from the hospital, a charity or community group. It is their role to support you and your family throughout the whole second opinion process.



What will happen during the second opinion process?

Once the referral has been received, the healthcare professional(s) giving the second opinion will carefully review this along with your child's medical records and other important information such as x-rays and other test results.

In some situations, the person giving the second opinion will meet and speak with you. Sometimes, they will also need to examine your child.



What will happen after the second opinion has been made?

After the second opinion has been made, the treatment options will be summarised in a written report. You will then have an opportunity to sit down with your child's team and discuss the options put forward in the report. You may have already had some preliminary discussions with your child's healthcare team about these potential outcomes before the external second opinion was requested.

This will be a very open and honest conversation. During this time, you will have the opportunity to ask any additional questions you may have.



Decisions will always be based on what is in your child's best interest.

To help decide this, sometimes a clinical ethics committee will be asked to give advice. In very rare cases where a strong difference of opinion continues between you and your doctors regarding your child's best treatment, eventually, a decision may need to be made in a court of law.

However, in most instances, a second opinion will help both you and your child's healthcare team agree on the course of treatment that is appropriate for your child.

Questions you may want to ask your child's healthcare team

In this situation it is normal to have lots of questions. You may want to write these down so you remember them when you meet with your child's healthcare team. Some questions you may want to ask are:

- How long is the second opinion process for my child likely to take?
- How will we be kept updated on what is happening in the process?
- Who do I get in touch with if I have any questions?
- Who is the doctor or team that will be asked to carry out the second opinion and how are they chosen?

Write down any thoughts or questions you may want to share here:



Further information

For more in-depth information regarding the second opinion process, please refer to the main guidance:

Seeking and Providing External Second Opinions in Paediatrics

www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/external-second-opinions



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