Out of Area Patient Registrations
Clarification Document

The purpose of this briefing to outline the background and process for registering patients as out of area. To support better understanding and an improved patient experience NHS England & Improvement, NHS Kernow CCG, NHS Devon CCG and NHS Somerset CCG have worked together to develop the following clarification document.

Background:

In January 2015 amendments were made to the National GP Contract which allowed all GP practices freedom to register new patients who live outside their practice area without any obligation on the practice to provide home visits for such patients when the patient is at home, away from, and unable to attend, their registered practice.

Practices are responsible for ensuring this is clinically appropriate in each individual case.

To support this NHS England/delegated CCGs must ensure all such patients are able to access primary medical services in their home area during core hours if they have an urgent care need and if they cannot reasonably be expected to attend their registered practice. In this context urgent care is where the patient’s medical condition is such that in the reasonable opinion of the patient’s registered practice attendance on the patient is required (i.e. home visit) and it would be clinically inappropriate for the patients to go their registered practice.

A national Directed Enhanced Service was established, which has continually rolled forward. The purpose of this DES is to secure the delivery of care to patients who are registered with a GP practice away from home under the new arrangements (out of area registered without home visiting duties) and who require urgent care and cannot reasonably be expected to attend their registered practice on clinical grounds (i.e. in general this would not be expected to apply to patients who live in close proximity to but outside their practice area).

The service provides urgent and local care, as deemed clinically necessary by the appointed GP practice, for such patients living in the appointed practice’s boundary area, as follows:

a. Access to essential primary medical care services for patients who fall ill at home during the weekday in hours period (8.00am to 6.30pm; Monday to Friday, excluding bank holidays) or who are recovering at home after a period of hospitalisation; and,

b. Home visits (where clinically required).

Registration Process:

Practices have discretion over whether to register any out of area patients, whether under regulation 30 of the GMS Regulations, or under pre-existing regulations which still oblige home visiting. Practices should make clear their position on accepting patients who live out of area in their local communications (GP practice website, NHS Choices website, practice leaflet, posters in the waiting room etc.) notwithstanding that each patient must be considered on their individual circumstances.
If a practice decides to register a patient as out of area under this regulation, the process will generally operate in exactly the same way as any new patient registration in that the patient completes the GMS1 (or equivalent) registration form and the practice enters details of the patient registration onto their GP system as normal. The difference is that they must include a manual note on the registration system using an agreed text string to identify the patient as out of area.

The text string agreed with PCSE is:

"OOAR" and should be added as free text prior to sending via the LINKS software.

This is crucial as it is the only means currently to identify patients registered without home visiting duties.

Extra care should be taken to include the text accurately as above and in uppercase - no abbreviations should be used.

Details of the registration are processed in the same way as any normal registration by the local registration department and the transfer of the patient's medical record requested. However, this will normally be without a change of the patient's address (unless out of area registration coincides with a house move).

The patient should be provided with information by the registered practice on how to access the urgent care arrangements commissioned by regional teams/CCGs, if they are unwell at home and attendance at the registered practice is not appropriate. A template letter for patients is available at Appendix A. Practices are advised to ensure they are in receipt of all the required information from their regional team or CCG before registering any patients under the regulations.

Patients should be advised that in all circumstances they should seek to contact their registered practice in the first instance when they need support at home.

What should an out of area patient do if they are ill at home, and are unable to travel to their registered practice?

These patients will access urgent primary medical care through NHS 111, but will be expected to contact NHS 111 only following enquiry with their registered GP practice for appropriate triage. If as a result of that enquiry the GP thinks a face to face consultation is necessary, the patient will be advised to ring NHS 111.

If community-based services are required by the out of area patient, the GP practice to which they are registered remains responsible for discussing the options with the patient, agreeing a course of action and making an appropriate referral.

As the practice where the person is now registered may not have knowledge of the services available where the patient usually resides, all CCGs should ensure that providers of NHS funded care in their area update the Directory of Services and NHS Choices regularly, and that this includes up-to-date information about the range of community services in their areas that remote GP practices can access.
The registering practice needs to be aware that essential services, as set out in the contract, will apply equally to out of area patient, as to other patients registered with the practice. Therefore, practices will need to make themselves familiar with services in the patient's own areas if the patient requires referral to other services.

It is expected that patients registered as out of area would generally be in good health and unlikely to require access to more specialist acute or community services. However, if circumstances change and the patient's health deteriorates it may be necessary to have a conversation with the patient as to whether it is in the best interests of the patient or clinically appropriate to remain with the practice or to find a GP Practice closer to their own home.
Appendix A – template letter to patients

Out of area registration (without home visits): who to contact

We have recently registered you at the practice as an ‘out of area’ registered patient. We are aware that you live outside the practice area (catchment area) and when we registered you we explained that we are not required to provide you with a home visit.

You may on occasion, develop an urgent illness or injury at home that means attending the GP surgery as normal would not be appropriate.

If you require a GP please contact the practice in the first instance. If we determine you need access to services local to where you live we may ask you to call NHS 111 advising that you are registered as Out of Area/GP Choice.

In these circumstances NHS 111 will direct you to the local service that has been established by NHS England for patients such as you. This local service could be a GP practice near to where you live, the local walk-in or urgent care centre, A&E or minor injuries unit.

This local service will then decide if you can attend for an urgent face to face appointment with a healthcare professional or if a home visit is needed which will be based on your individual circumstances.

If this is in the out-of-hours period when GP surgeries are normally closed – between 6:30pm and 8:00am weekdays and during weekends – NHS 111 will direct you to the local out-GP of-hours provider.