

Royal College of Surgeons

Guidance for producing cosmetic surgery information for patients



Introduction

This guidance is for individuals and organisations that produce information for people who are considering undergoing cosmetic surgery.

It outlines best practice for developing patient information for cosmetic surgery. It aims to raise the standard and consistency of information, ensure it meets the needs of people considering a procedure and advocates patient safety.

This guidance was developed following the 2013 Keogh Review of the Regulation of Cosmetic Interventions, which made a number of recommendations to improve cosmetic practice.

We worked with patients, surgeons and providers of cosmetic surgery to develop this guidance. If you have any comments about the guidance, or would like to suggest changes or improvements, please email cosmeticsurgerystandards@rcseng.ac.uk

Key principles

When you produce patient information you should aim to meet the principles of the [Information Standard \(IS\)](#). The IS is a certification programme for all organisations producing evidence-based health and care information for the public.

These principles are:

1. Information Production: you have a defined and documented process for producing high-quality information
2. Evidence Sources: you only use current, relevant, balanced and trustworthy evidence sources
3. User Understanding and Involvement: you understand your users and you user-test your information
4. End Product: you double-check your end products
5. Feedback: you manage comments/complaint/incidents appropriately
6. Review: you review your products and process on a planned and regular basis

In addition to the above IS principles, evidence does not need to be limited to UK-based research. Where there is not sufficient evidence, use the best available information. Clearly state the quality of the evidence used to develop your patient information.

Following these key principles should help ensure your information is clear, accurate, balanced, evidence-based and up to date.

Content: what you should include in your information

The below information should be included when producing cosmetic surgery patient information to help patients make the best decision for them.

The aim of surgery

- The purpose of the procedure
- The potential benefits and the likelihood of success
- How long the benefits of the procedure will typically last
- Whether the surgery, or parts of it, will need to be repeated in the future to maintain the results
- The potential limitations of the procedure
- Patients that should and shouldn't have surgery

Alternative treatments

- Different treatment options that may be available to a patient, including alternatives to surgery

About the procedure

- What the procedure involves
- The type of anaesthetic that would be used
- How long the procedure normally lasts and how it will be carried out
- The time that a patient would typically spend in hospital
- Whether further surgery may be needed in the future
- For procedures that include having an implant: how long the implant would typically be expected to last for before the patient may need to have it replaced or removed
- Who will be performing the surgery and do they have the appropriate skills, experience and insurance
- Where the procedure will take place and confirmation that the service is registered with the appropriate regulator
- What will happen if there is an unexpected complication during the surgery; for example, is there an emergency department or emergency equipment on site?

Before surgery

- How the patient should prepare for the procedure
- What is likely to happen on the day of the procedure
- Is the patient allowed to drive to the surgery and should they be accompanied by someone?
- What the patient can and cannot do before surgery

Risks and possible side effects

- Potential risks and complications of the surgery
- Potential short- and long-term side effects of the surgery

Aftercare and recovery

- What is likely to happen immediately after surgery
- The recovery time and process
- The level of pain that may be expected, and options for pain relief
- How long the pain is likely to last
- What care and dressing will be necessary and who will do them?
- The time a patient might expect to need off work
- What activities the patient will/will not be able to do after surgery – for example, can the patient drive after surgery?
- The time before a patient might expect to return to normal activities
- When the patient will typically expect to see initial results from the procedure
- Who the patient should contact if they are not happy with their outcome or experience a complication
- Information on the complaints process

Overall cost of surgery

- Cost of initial consultation
- What is and is not included in the cost of the procedure, and what happens to any money paid if a patient changes their mind before undergoing surgery
- Any notable exclusions from the costs – in particular, whether the costs cover addressing or correcting any problems post-surgery

Other information

- The evidence base
- Let patients know that they should take time to make the decision that is right for them and that they should take at least two weeks between the consultation and the surgery
- It should be made clear if a clinic or hospital is providing cosmetic surgery through a third party (ie if the service where the procedure is taking place is not owned by them). It should be explained what third party involvement means for the patient in terms of liability and governance

How to present patient information

Keep language plain and simple

- Use plain language and everyday words
- Explain any medical words
- Use short sentences and paragraphs; cut out unnecessary words
- Use an active tone and talk directly to your reader

Break complex information down

- Present information in small chunks
- Use visual representations when they can explain better than words, or where they aid understanding
- When describing risk, use a combination of words and numbers (where possible) to explain the probability of complications

Think about layout

- Ensure the design is clear and visually engaging
- Use headings, bullet points and colour to help users navigate your information
- Avoid italics and capital letters; use bold text for emphasis; left justify; use a clear font and at least 12 point text size
- Use appropriate diagrams in a meaningful way

Helpful resources

Patient Information Forum's tool kit

Providing practical help and support for creating health information that works. The toolkit brings together best practice guidance with practical resources: <http://www.pifonline.org.uk/toolkit/>

Information Standard

The Information Standard is a certification programme for all organisations producing evidence-based health and care information for the public: <http://www.england.nhs.uk/tis/>