SKELETAL SURVEY COMPLETION INFORMING CHILD PROTECTION PROCESS

SITUATION

Skeletal surveys are undertaken as part of the medical investigation contributing to a Child Protection Investigation. It has come to the attention of the Specialist Team that Cases have been ‘closed’ by multi-agency colleagues before the outcome of the skeletal survey is known.

BACKGROUND

The skeletal survey is a set of X-rays that are undertaken to look for occult fractures. These x-rays are recommended in national guidance (1),(2) whenever physical abuse is suspected in a child under 2 years. The investigation comprises initial x-rays (usually done within a day of child presenting to health) and follow up x-rays undertaken 11-14 days later. The reason for follow up x ray is 2 fold:

1. Any abnormal or suspicious area seen on the original x-rays will be reviewed to confirm the presence or absence of fracture.
2. Rib X-rays are repeated as ‘new’ or acute rib fractures may not be seen until they have begun healing and would not be picked up until the repeat X-rays.

All children who are referred for skeletal survey must have both sets of X-rays in order to complete the investigation.

ASSESSMENT

It has been noted that a small number of parents have attended the X-ray department for their repeat X-rays stating that their ‘case’ has been closed by social work or police, sometimes showing a letter to prove this. These parents are understandably questioning the necessity of repeat x-rays. This puts children at significant risk as the repeat X-rays may reveal fractures not previously noted. This would clearly impact the outcome of the investigation.

PLANNING

1. The outcome of Child Protection Investigation is not known until all the medical investigation results are available.
2. Medical staff will make this explicit to families undergoing investigation by providing the leaflet explaining skeletal survey to families.
3. Social Work and Police colleagues are advised to wait for the completion of the skeletal survey result before closing the child’s case.

References:
2. The Radiological Investigation of suspected physical abuse in children Royal College of Radiologists 2018

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