## A SAMPLE HANDOUT ON SPECIALTY REFERRALS

# Specialty Referrals and Managed Care

If you belong to an HMO, your insurance company may have asked you to choose a “primary care provider” to manage all your health care needs. Family physicians are well-qualified to fulfill this role. We have been trained to provide cradle-to-grave care for you and your family. We diagnose and treat diseases from skin rashes to heart attacks. We are skilled at preventing disease. And we want to build doctor-patient relationships based on mutual trust and respect.

Family physicians can treat 85 to 90 percent of their patients’ medical problems. How do we handle the few problems we are unable to treat? We refer patients with those problems to the appropriate specialists.

**The referral process**

Referrals work pretty much the same for all patients, with one exception: If you are in an HMO, we can generally refer you only to specialists who participate with your HMO. That is, if a physician is not on your HMO’s list of “participating providers,” your HMO will not pay for visits to that physician. To check, simply call your health plan’s customer service line or consult its current provider directory.

We hope you have chosen us as your primary care providers because you trust us to give you quality health care. Part of that trust involves trusting us to decide when to call in a physician who specializes in certain health problems. We refer patients only after we have had a chance to evaluate their conditions. For example, if you had an earache, you would not immediately seek the care of an ear, nose and throat specialist. Instead, you would visit our office so that your family physician could diagnose and treat your earache appropriately. If your case required special treatment, your family physician would then refer you.

Once your family physician has made a referral, our office staff will guide you in setting up an appointment with the specialist your family physician has recommended. When you go to the specialist’s office for your first visit, take your referral forms with you. The specialist will then work with your family physician to diagnose and treat your special problems. Once the specialist has completed his or her evaluation or treatment, your family physician will continue your care.

We thank you for your trust in choosing us as your health care providers.

Developed by Ernest Josef, MD. Copyright © 1999 American Academy of Family Physicians. Physicians may photocopy or adapt for use in their own practices; all other rights reserved. White B. A broader view of patient education. *Fam Pract Manag*. February 1999:53-54; http://www.aafp.org/fpm/990200fm/broader.html.