Management of Discharging Ear

Patient information at: Middle Ear Infections

Patient with discharging ear: green, yellow fluid eliminating from the ear canal

Does the patient have acute symptoms of otitis externa: pain, non-mucoid discharge, hearing loss, swollen ear canal?

No

Is it acute otitis media?

Treat according to other guidelines (SIGN/NICE, Acute otitis media)

No

Consider alternative diagnosis - (ie furunculosis, granular myringitis, malignant otitis externa etc)

Yes

Is it chronic suppurative otitis media? i.e. persistent mucoid smelly discharge, with or without deafness

No

If symptoms do not clear

Refer to ENT

Yes

2 week course of topical antibiotic/steroid drops and review

Symptoms resolve and cause clearly identified and not serious?

Yes

Refer to ENT

No

Refer to ENT with the following information
- Patient history
- Treatments tried: duration, side effects, response
- Results of any investigations

Discharge from ENT clinic with specific management plan

Note:
Aminoglycoside ear drops may in theory be ototoxic in the presence of a non-intact tympanic membrane, but in general are safe to use for up to 2 weeks in the presence of definite infection. However, aminoglycoside ear drops are not recommended in the better or only hearing ear in patients with pre-existing hearing loss. Consider ofloxacin drops as an alternative (unlicensed indication).