What is a lumbar puncture (LP)?

- A lumbar puncture is a procedure used to obtain a sample of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF).
- CSF is the fluid that bathes and protects the brain and spinal cord.
- CSF is produced constantly, so that the small amount removed during an LP is rapidly replaced.
- It will be performed by a Doctor or Advanced Nurse Practitioner (ANP).

Why am I having a lumbar puncture?

- When CSF is analysed it can give us information about a range of conditions which may affect the brain and spinal cord (the central nervous system).
- If you are unsure why the procedure is being done ask the person who intends to do it.
- You will be asked to sign a consent form prior to the procedure.
How is the test performed?

- You may be asked to lie on your side at the edge of the bed, with your knees curled up towards your stomach, or the procedure may be performed with you sitting up with your head resting on a table, supported by a pillow.

What will I feel?

- The skin of the lower back is cleaned with an antiseptic - (please state if you have any allergies), which feels cold and wet.

- To numb the area a local anaesthetic is injected under the skin, with a very fine needle, this may sting for a few seconds.

- You may feel a sensation of pushing and/or pressure as the lumbar puncture needle is inserted,

- You may feel a brief tingling/pushing sensation when the needle is pushed forward, which can be slightly uncomfortable.

- It is normal to feel this, often down one leg, and does not indicate that anything is wrong, but please tell the Dr/ANP if you should feel this.
• This feeling should stop within a few seconds. It is important to try not to move, once the needle is correctly positioned.

• The Doctor/ANP may need to measure the pressure and will collect samples to send to the laboratory for testing.

• The procedure usually takes about 20 minutes. After the procedure it helps if you drink plenty of fluids, particularly those containing caffeine.

• It is not necessary to lie flat after the procedure, unless you experience a post LP headache, (usually the next day), when lying flat will be more comfortable.

What are the side effects and risks?

• Post- LP headache, caused by the removal of the CSF. Symptoms are eased by lying down, taking painkillers and drinking fluids.

• Infection, this is very rare as the procedure is done under sterile conditions.

• Bleeding at the site of needle entry (it is important that you tell the person who will perform the LP, if you have any bleeding disorder or if you are on any anticoagulants such as Warfarin).

• Backache again occurs rarely, and should settle in a few days, by taking simple analgesia.

• Nerve damage is an extremely rare risk.