The following is some brief guidance on the management of referred otalgia. It is written with the intention of helping the Ear Practitioner to diagnose diseases that cause referred ear pain and to know when to refer for specialist treatment. It does not replace a good knowledge of the underlying anatomy, physiology or pathology and these must be studied as well.

You should use this guidance only after a careful history has been taken and an examination performed.

Remember these key features:

1. Referred otalgia is diagnosed when the patient complains of ear pain but the ear exam is normal
2. If the patient has hoarseness, pain on swallowing, is a long term smoker or an alcoholic you must consider cancer as a possibility and refer
3. You must examine the patient’s mouth, teeth, and tongue for infections and cancers
4. You must examine the neck for lumps
5. You should palpate the temporomandibular joint and the muscles attached to it
6. You must keep a careful note of the history and examination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patient complains of ear pain</th>
<th>Ear exam normal</th>
<th>Ear exam abnormal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ear exam normal</td>
<td>The diagnosis is referred otalgia. You must ask about:</td>
<td>Proceed to manage the ear disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoarseness</td>
<td>Yes? Refer to ENT</td>
<td>Yes? Refer to ENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoking and alcohol history</td>
<td>Yes? Refer to ENT</td>
<td>Yes? Refer to ENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pain or difficulty with swallowing</td>
<td>Yes? Refer to ENT</td>
<td>Yes? Refer to ENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coughing up blood</td>
<td>Yes? Refer to ENT</td>
<td>Yes? Refer to ENT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You must examine:

- The tongue – is there and ulcer or growth? Yes? Refer to ENT
- The tonsils – is one much larger than the other? Yes? Refer to ENT
- The tonsils – is there infection? Yes? Give amoxycillin 250mg. 3x daily for 7 days
- The lips & gums – is there a growth or persistent ulcer? Yes? Refer to ENT
- The neck – is there a slowly growing or large mass? Yes? Refer to ENT
- The teeth – is there infection or decay? Yes? Refer to dentist
- The TMJ and muscles – is there tenderness? Yes? Refer to dentist