

Bernie Hancox

Patient, Woolton House Medical Centre, Woolton, Liverpool

More and more patients are now feeling the benefit of the Choose and Book system, now used by 88 GP practices throughout Liverpool. Choose and Book allows patients to choose their hospital and book an appointment for a time that suits them.

It underlines the NHS commitment to offering the broadest possible choice to patients. This not only allows the patient more flexibility, it also gives them a greater say in when and where they are treated.

Bernie Hancox, an Outdoor Advertising Contractor from Hunts Cross, was having problems with his hand, which meant doing normal things was "practically impossible".

"I made an appointment with my GP – Dr Webster at Woolton House Medical Centre – and he recommended I see an orthopaedic specialist."

Bernie was worried that his busy work schedule would mean he would have to turn down hospital appointments. "I'd just taken on some important contracts. Being self-employed, my business has to come first." Bernie also anticipated a long wait for an appointment and having to "haggle" over a convenient time and date. What followed, he admits, was "a revelation".

"I was surprised when the GP mentioned Choose & Book, as I didn't realise I had any choice in the matter! He printed off a list of hospitals available to me and their current waiting times. The one that stood out was the Cheshire and Merseyside NHS Treatment Centre in Halton – I could have an appointment there within six days."



In order to book his appointment at the hospital, Bernie was given a telephone number and a password, which was automatically generated by the Choose and Book system.

"When I got home, I went through my diary and found a day that suited me. I rang the number the GP had given me and booked the appointment with the hospital. It was that simple!"

Bernie needed to telephone the hospital directly to make his appointment because the computer systems at the hospital are not yet linked to Choose and Book. This will change in time as new computer systems are installed. Where hospital systems are already linked to Choose and Book, patients can telephone a national call centre to make their appointment. This is called the Appointments Line and is open seven days a week, 7am to 10pm. Patients can also book their appointment at the GP practice or over the internet at www.healthspace.nhs.uk.

If Bernie was surprised by the speed of his appointment – five days after seeing his GP – he was even more impressed by the quality of service at the Cheshire and Merseyside NHS

Treatment Centre. "The staff there were fantastic. I can't praise them highly enough. I saw the Consultant who confirmed I'd need an operation, but that I would need some tests doing first. I was expecting to be told I'd have to come back a few weeks later, but all the tests were done there and then. When I was leaving they said they'd see me next week. I thought it was for more tests, but it was the date for my operation!"

Bernie's wife, Heather, was also hugely impressed with the Cheshire and Merseyside NHS Treatment Centre, Halton: "They treated me with total respect – as if I were patient as well."

Three weeks later, Bernie was back at work. "It wasn't a big operation, but the speed and efficiency with which it was handled, from start to finish, made all the difference," Bernie enthuses, "Choose and Book meant I was more in control of things and that's really reassuring."

"I started out thinking it would take forever and a day to get an appointment. Now I know it's not really like that. Going through Choose and Book has been a wonderful experience."