

Transforming the referral pathway for physiotherapy services

Bournemouth and Poole Primary Care Trust



Bournemouth and Poole

With over 12.5 million referrals having been made using the system to date, Choose and Book continues to become the everyday method of referral across the NHS.

Used predominantly for electronic referral to first consultant led outpatient appointments, many local health communities are now expanding coverage of Choose and Book to extend the benefits of electronic referral to other types of practitioners – such as therapy services and allied health professionals.

This case study describes how Choose and Book has helped the Bournemouth and Poole Primary Care Trust (PCT) transform their referral pathway for physiotherapy services.

This resulted in an improved standard of referrals received through better quality information, and no delays in the patient pathway.

Also, senior clinical staff can now triage referrals online from any place of work, rather than needing to travel to their local patient contact centre to do so.



Bournemouth and Poole PCT headquarters

Allied Health Professionals

Increasingly local care pathways have extended to therapy services. As Choose and Book coverage also extends, it is encompassing more and more therapy services - increasing the numbers of referrals allied health professionals receive through Choose and Book.

NHS Bournemouth and Poole

NHS Bournemouth and Poole is the local NHS organisation tasked with improving the health and well-being of the local population of Bournemouth and Poole. In March 2008, 355,400 people were registered with GPs serving the Bournemouth and Poole PCT area population.

This case study looks at physiotherapy within the Bournemouth area, where the service is provided by The Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch NHS Foundation Trust. This is a musculoskeletal service delivered with 6.7 WTE physiotherapists. NHS Bournemouth and Poole commission seven physiotherapy providers across their community.

The East Dorset Patient Contact Centre (PCC) opened in October 2004. Managing electronic bookings and referrals for Bournemouth PCT, Poole PCT and South East Dorset PCT, the centre covers the east of the county of Dorset, comprising 65 GP surgeries.

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Liz Barfield, Commissioning and PCC Manager, NHS Bournemouth and Poole tells us how they took the opportunity to transform their referral pathway when implementing Choose and Book for the community physiotherapy service in the East Dorset PCC.

Booking physiotherapy through Choose and Book

“When the Patient Contact Centre was first set up, it booked some community services through a local appointments system rather than Choose and Book, including Podiatry, Physiotherapy and Medical termination of pregnancy” said Liz.

The Physiotherapy service only covered bookings for the old Bournemouth PCT region. Provided by physiotherapists from the local acute trust, this is a community service delivered on three local sites:

- Royal Bournemouth Hospital
- East Way Clinic (Community clinic)
- Southbourne Surgery (GP Surgery)

The PCC managed all the Adult Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy bookings from April 2006 using a local software system. Within the first year it became clear that the software was inflexible – physiotherapists had to be faxed their clinic lists daily as the software could not be linked to the hospital systems. Senior physiotherapists also had to visit the PCC to triage the referrals and there appeared to be a number of delays within the pathway.

It was clear to the team that a review of their referral pathway and processes was needed to identify delays in the pathway.



East Dorset Patient Contact Centre

The review uncovered a number of problems with the existing referral pathway, including: delays; 'data-basing' patient details; and labour intensive processes for both clinical and administrative staff.

“We found our senior physiotherapists needed to visit the centre twice a week to triage around 60 to 80 referrals at each visit. Writing to every patient inviting them to ring in and book their appointment, and then also waiting for them to book – well this often resulted in delays throughout the pathway” confirmed Liz.

Transforming the referral pathway

Following the review of the processes, the team made some changes to their referral pathway and introduced Choose and Book to help facilitate the new pathway.

In September 2005 when Choose and Book went live across Dorset, the patient contact centre became a local appointments line.

This facility opens Monday to Friday 08.30– 18.00, and outside of these hours patient calls are diverted to the national Appointments Line (TAL).



“What it really gave us was the ability to better manage the referrals workload” said Liz Barfield, Commissioning and PCC Manager. “Senior clinical staff could triage referrals online using the Choose and Book application in any place of work.”

Liz Barfield
Commissioning and PCC
Manager, NHS Bournemouth
and Poole

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“Our waiting times have reduced dramatically due to the improved pathway through Choose and Book. By triaging daily, we can see immediately how long a patient is waiting for their appointment at each of our locations.”

Cathy Neyland
Primary Care Coordinator,
Physiotherapy Department,
Royal Bournemouth Hospital

Shortly following this, the new referral pathway using Choose and Book rolled out to the Adult Musculoskeletal service on 6th October 2008. The monthly average for physiotherapy bookings through Choose and Book across Bournemouth and Poole now varies from 450-500, and of these approximately 20-25 referrals are triaged every day.

Realising the benefits of Choose and Book

“What it really gave us was the ability to better manage the referrals workload” said Liz Barfield, Commissioning and PCC Manager. “Senior clinical staff could triage referrals online using the Choose and Book application in any place of work – without needing to

travel to the patient contact centre twice a week to do the work there. This meant staff could triage daily for shorter periods, and that the triage was no longer confined to just a few senior staff members – other staff could review referrals also. Physiotherapists could manage their own referrals – accepting, rejecting or redirecting when required – and they did” confirms Liz.

The new pathway using Choose and Book also gave the allied health professionals a better standard of referrals, compared to what they had previously received. “This was due to the fact that we were using integrated GP clinical systems with Choose and Book” says Liz. “And the fact that the Choose and Book application gives you all the referral information in the one place, also helped with this.”

The allied health professionals using the system can also see the benefits. “Previously many of the referrals were illegible and with important missing data, for example, a patient’s date of birth, GP name and surgery – which delayed the patient getting an appointment. Now, this information is within the Choose and Book application and many of the referrals are typed” agrees Cathy Neyland, Primary Care Coordinator, Physiotherapy Department, Royal Bournemouth Hospital.

Overcoming initial challenges

In realising these benefits, the Bournemouth and Poole area have also found a challenge in managing the new process – which has been to ensure GPs add referral letters to the Choose and Book application in a timely manner. With shorter waiting times this is a particular issue for this area.

The changes to the referral pathway using Choose and Book resulted in:

- clinical staff managing their own referrals online
- daily triaging of referrals
- better quality referral information
- reduced waiting times for patients

Cathy confirms, “We regularly run a ‘missing referral’ enquiry for the week ahead. The GP Practice is requested to add the referral onto the system as soon as possible. This can be time consuming and frustrating, particularly when the same practices are frequent offenders, however this has helped identify training needs within the community for the Choose and Book team.”

“The other challenge has been educating the GP’s which referrals are appropriate” says Cathy. “Referred patients who are inappropriate for our service, we then have to reject and cancel the patient’s appointment.

“What became quite clear throughout the process review and then making the changes, was that if you have a poor process, then adding Choose and Book to this process will not fix it – it will only make the poor processes electronic, and the problems more transparent.”

Liz Barfield
Commissioning and PCC
Manager, NHS Bournemouth
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The community physiotherapy service then notify the patient of the cancellation, which again is time consuming for our staff, and occasionally confusing for the patients too" she adds.

It is due to the very short waiting times that the provider contacts the patient to notify them of any cancellations in Bournemouth and Poole – in order to reduce the number of patients who might attend following their appointment being cancelled. NHS Bournemouth and Poole acknowledge that these issues are minor and as the new process is embedded it is anticipated that these will reduce even further in numbers.

Conclusion

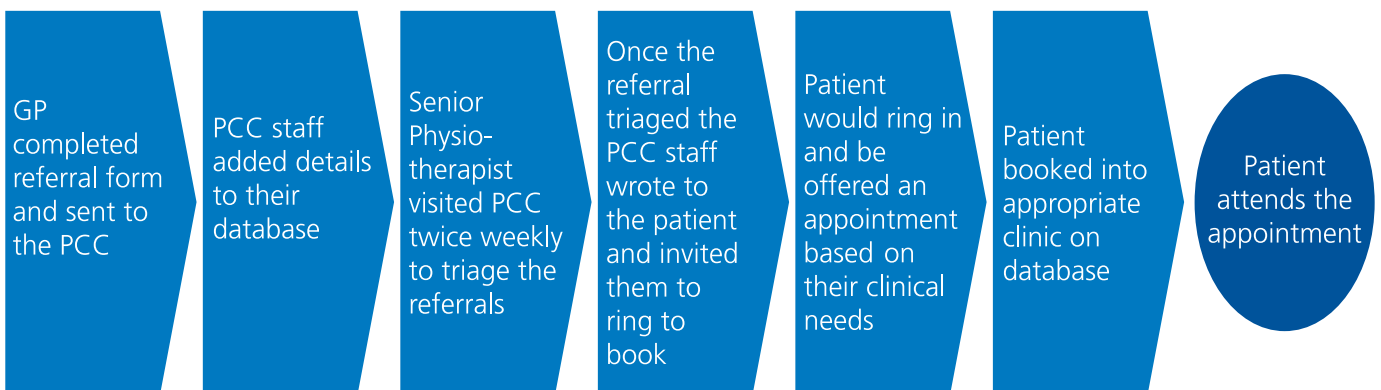
"Choose and Book was only part of the solution for us here in Bournemouth and Poole, but we have seen some good improvements here" finishes Liz.

"Our waiting times have reduced dramatically due to the improved pathway through Choose and Book" agrees Cathy. "By triaging daily, we can see immediately how long a patient is waiting for their appointment at each of our locations. So much so that we're planning to review other community physiotherapy services across Poole in the near future, and other allied health professional clinics and pathways – to see if we can add these to Choose and Book also".

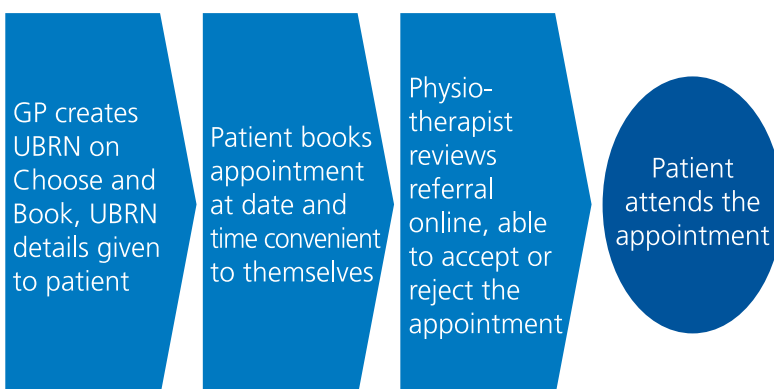


Bournemouth and Poole PCT headquarters

Previous physiotherapy pathway



New physiotherapy pathway



NHS Connecting for Health is supporting the NHS to introduce new computer systems and services such as Choose and Book. These will help the NHS to deliver better, safer care for patients. For more information about this, visit our website www.connectingforhealth.nhs.uk