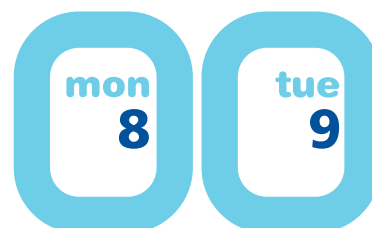
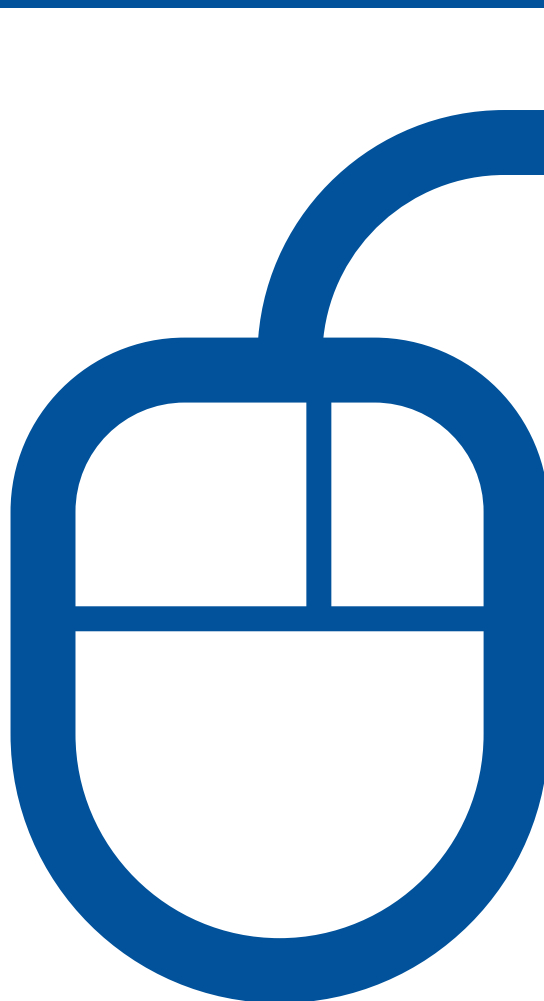


choose and book

# Myth busting – primary care

June 2009



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A number of misunderstandings have arisen about Choose and Book. This document aims to identify the myths and to set the record straight by providing information, guidance and advice.

## **My patients want to go to their local hospital; they aren't interested in choice so I'm not using Choose and Book**

Although Choose and Book supports patient choice, there is more to Choose and Book than just enabling choice of provider. Even patients who choose to go to a local hospital can be offered choice of date or time for their appointment – providing greater certainty of when they will be seen by a specialist and reducing their anxiety. They will also have the choice of how they book their appointment be it in the GP practice, over the telephone or internet.

Sending referrals electronically using Choose and Book offers a safer, quicker, and more secure method of referral – allowing staff to track a patient's progress, patients to book an appointment more easily, and eliminating the possibility of referral letters and appointment confirmations being lost in the post.

## **I can't refer to a named clinician so it's no use**

The ability to support referrals to individual, named clinicians is possible in Choose and Book and this functionality should be made available wherever possible to support good clinical practice – regardless of whether services have been set up as directly or indirectly bookable.

The decision on whether or not to use this functionality is taken locally and should reflect local needs and circumstances. It is recommended that commissioners work with their referrers and providers to assess whether named clinician functionality should be used. Choose and Book should not be used to constrain referral practices.

Guidance on making Named Clinician referrals using Choose and Book is available at: [www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/staff/commsmaterials/fact-sheets/nc.pdf](http://www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/staff/commsmaterials/fact-sheets/nc.pdf)

## **It is not the best use of a referrer's time to be doing administration work like booking appointments**

While there is some impact on a referrer's workload, it is not significant. The booking process itself can take place after the consultation if needed, or indeed away from the surgery which is how most patients book their appointment. Choose and Book is flexible and is designed to allow appointments to be booked by GP practice staff or by the patient online or via telephone.

## **I'm too busy in surgery to make a referral – it just takes too long**

For the one or two referrals most referrers make in a day, they will need to search for, and discuss with patients, their referral and Choice options. For most, this only takes a few minutes, and can easily be completed during surgery consultation. It is important for local GP practices to identify what works best for them, and to consider the benefits that Choose and Book can offer when referrals and bookings are made in the surgery. Benefits can include:

- patient certainty and convenience
- less appointment chasing/enquiries
- referrer and GP practice staff time savings.

### **The system is too slow and unreliable**

Local benchmarking and national monitoring shows that Choose and Book has good performance and availability. End-user experience of Choose and Book is – like all web applications – dependent to a certain extent on local IT set-up and maintenance.

Guidance on resolving basic local infrastructure technical issues is available at: [www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/staff/commsmaterials/fact-sheets/tech.pdf](http://www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/staff/commsmaterials/fact-sheets/tech.pdf)

Over the last 12 months the national live service of the Choose and Book application has performed well and has been available over 99.5% of the time during core hours (99.7% outside core hours). The national Choose and Book team continually look at opportunities to improve the speed and end-user experience of the system.

### **I sometimes find that no appointments are available, so I just end up giving up**

This is not a technical fault with Choose and Book. Individual hospitals are responsible for making their appointments available through Choose and Book so that sufficient slots are there to book into.

If referrers or GP practice staff cannot find an available appointment at their patient's choice of provider, they need to ask the patient to call The Appointments Line (TAL). TAL will then initiate the Department of Health's process for securing the patient an available appointment at the provider of their choice, by forwarding the patient's details to the hospital concerned. The provider must then contact the patient directly to arrange an appointment date and time.

Primary care trusts (PCTs) are responsible for ensuring that sufficient treatment options are available for referrers to offer to patients. Local health communities must work closely together so that hospitals and clinics make enough appointments available to meet patient demand. This can present a challenge for provider organisations when balancing the demand for appointments with patient maximum waiting times.

The Department of Health has issued guidance on the process for managing appointment slot issues. A capacity management toolkit is also available to provider organisations to help them proactively manage their capacity, and increase use of Choose and Book whilst meeting the 18 Week Referral to Treatment target.

Guidance on resolving appointment slot issues is available at: [www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/staff/implement/guides/index\\_html#appointment](http://www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/staff/implement/guides/index_html#appointment)

The 18 Weeks and Choose and Book toolkit is available by registering at: [www.directory-of-services.info/asplogin/register.asp](http://www.directory-of-services.info/asplogin/register.asp)

### **It's difficult to find the services I'm looking for on the Directory of Services as they are all described in different ways**

When set up correctly, the Directory of Services (DoS) provides a 'shop window' of provider services which can be easily accessed by referrers to find and shortlist clinically appropriate services for their patients effectively.

A successful DoS is dependent on provider organisations working with primary care to ensure that their local services are described in a way that is clear and easy to understand by referrers. Providers need to ensure that each service on the DoS follows the service naming convention and contains accurate and up to date information.

In order to find services effectively on the Directory of Services, referrers can search using: 'SNOMED Clinical Terms'; 'Specialty' and 'Clinic Type'; 'Named Clinician' (where services have been set up to support this); 'Organisation'; and/or age and gender.

Guidance for referrers on finding services effectively is available at: [www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/staff/commsmaterials/fact-sheets/fse.pdf](http://www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/staff/commsmaterials/fact-sheets/fse.pdf)

### **There isn't enough information to let patients choose**

There is comprehensive information available to help patients choose their hospital for treatment.

The Choose and Book application displays available appointment dates and times to help patients choose. The NHS Choices website also provides information on hospitals; treatments offered; facilities and patient support; maps,

directions and transport; and patient feedback. The website also includes quality scorecards to support patients in deciding where and when they receive treatment. The NHS Choices website is available at: [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

Further information is also available on the Care Quality Commission website at: [www.cqc.org.uk](http://www.cqc.org.uk)

Additional support to help vulnerable groups with choice and booking is available through public libraries following a successful pilot in delivering information equitably to all. Almost half of the entire UK population have visited a library, therefore supporting the public to access online information using libraries helps to ensure greater equality of access. The pilot used libraries to help patients find information to assist them in their choice of hospital and support them in booking their appointment through Choose and Book.

### **The N3 connection isn't fast enough for Choose and Book to run**

Local benchmarking suggests that when local configuration is correct, the Choose and Book application has excellent usability and speed.

Technical Troubleshooters are available in all areas across England to ensure users have optimum technical efficiency for using Choose and Book. Further information is available by contacting your SHA Choose and Book lead.

### **We can't use Choose and Book for urgent priorities such as patients needing to be treated within two weeks**

Choose and Book supports both urgent and two week wait (2WW) referrals, and many local health communities use Choose and Book for these referrals.

Following an extensive pilot exercise carried out at eight local health communities, the Department of Health issued guidance for managing 2WW referrals using Choose and Book.

Guidance on urgent and 2WW referrals is available at: [www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/staff/implement/guides/2ww\\_guide](http://www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/staff/implement/guides/2ww_guide)

### **Referrers must book the date, time and place of the appointment during their consultation**

Although many referrers prefer to book the date, time and place of the appointment during a patient's consultation, the minimum the referrer needs to do during consultation is to have a choice conversation with the patient and initiate an appointment request using Choose and Book for the agreed (and clinically appropriate) options.

The actual appointment booking can occur outside the consultation room, either within or outside the GP practice, for example by the patient calling TAL or booking online.

Generating appointment requests and booking appointments using Choose and Book is an intuitive process, and feedback from users indicates that once used regularly, the appointment booking process can be completed quickly and easily.

### **Patient confidentiality is not protected by Choose and Book**

Patient confidentiality is taken very seriously and Choose and Book incorporates several different methods of protecting a patient's data to ensure confidentiality and safety. These include data encryption for sending and receiving information, a staff Passcode and a Smartcard. To gain access to either end of the transaction, a user must have a Smartcard and a Passcode. This card contains a digital certificate, which is checked against the NHS staff database, and authenticates the user. Only then can a user gain access to Choose and Book.

Other security measures include restricting access to information to only those with a genuine care relationship with the patient, and even then, they will only be able to view the information they need, based on their role. NHS staff are bound to a duty of confidentiality, both by the Common Law and the Data Protection Act (1998).

### **Referrers are not involved in the ongoing design of Choose and Book**

The Request for Assessment (RFA) process provides an opportunity for clinicians to suggest improvements to the Choose and Book application.

Requests are prioritised by Strategic Health Authority (SHA) based user groups before being presented to the national Choose and Book Design Steering Group (DSG) for consideration. Members of this group are made up from diverse clinical backgrounds including practicing primary and secondary care clinicians and a BMA representative.

If the request is supported by this group it is passed to the National Choose and Book Development Team, and subsequently to Atos Origin (the main supplier contracted to deliver the Choose and Book software), for an impact assessment before being incorporated into a future release. Once an RFA has been accepted, it may also be subject to input from the National Clinical Reference Panel (NCRP) originally established in 2003 comprising primary and secondary care clinicians.

Further information on the RFA process is available at: [www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/staff/future/making-a-request-for-additional-functionality-or-services-1/index.html](http://www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/staff/future/making-a-request-for-additional-functionality-or-services-1/index.html) (NHSNet connection required).

The national Choose and Book team also includes a number of practising GPs as Choose and Book National Clinical Leads.

### **The referrer needs to attach the referral letter within 24 hours**

This is not so. The referral letter needs to be attached sufficiently in advance of the appointment for the consultant to review the case appropriately. It is in the patient's best interests to have the consultant review and confirm the appointment at the earliest possible opportunity. Best practice indicates that:

- 2WW - referral letters should be attached on the same day
- Urgent - referral letters should be attached within one working day, and
- Routine - referral letters should be attached within three working days.

There may be exceptions when these timeframes are exceeded, but these should be in exceptional cases only.

## **Choose and Book involves emailing referrals**

Choose and Book does not use any form of email. Referral letters are attached to the booking request. Currently there are two ways in which a booking and referral document can be created.

The first is using a Choose and Book compliant primary care system. When using these, the patient demographics are automatically passed to the Choose and Book application. Similarly, if a referral letter needs to be created this is done using a template within the Choose and Book application, and is auto populated with clinical data from the primary care system, using previously agreed rules. This letter is then held in Choose and Book where it can be reviewed or printed.

The second way is to use the web based referrer. This is separate from a primary care system, and so no information can flow between them. The referral letter is generated by the referrer or GP practice staff either in Word or another document format. This letter is then attached to a referral request or booking.

Neither of these routes uses email, because it does not match the safety and security provided by the Choose and Book service.

## **I won't know what's happened to my patient once I have referred them**

Through Choose and Book referrers and GP practice staff will be able to see what choice of service the patient has made, the time of the appointment, whether the referral has been accepted or not, and whether the patient has phoned TAL to make, change or cancel an appointment.

In the same way as they would remain responsible for other parts of patient care, referrers have a duty of care to monitor and track the progress of an appointment on the activity list until the provider organisation has reviewed and accepted the referral.

## **Choose and Book does not support the 18 Week Referral to Treatment pathway**

Choose and Book acts as a tool to help measure and deliver the 18 Week Referral to Treatment pathway by:

1. providing a 'clock start' date from which 18 Weeks is counted
2. helping patients be seen more quickly by reducing waiting times, and
3. increasing efficiencies in the hospital, such as the ability to review referral information electronically.

A range of frequently asked questions on Choose and Book and 18 Weeks is available at: [www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/staff/implement/guides/index\\_html#frequently](http://www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/staff/implement/guides/index_html#frequently)

Case studies demonstrating how Choose and Book has helped reduce waiting times and improve referral pathways are available at: [www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/staff/commsmaterials/case-studies](http://www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/staff/commsmaterials/case-studies)

## **Choose and Book does not support referrals into diagnostic services**

Choose and Book can support referrals into diagnostic services.

Guidance on how to make referrals into all diagnostic services through Choose and Book along with the necessary information required to load services is available at:

[www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/staff/implement/guides/index\\_html#Diagnostics](http://www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/staff/implement/guides/index_html#Diagnostics)

## **Choose and Book does not support Practice Based Commissioning**

This is not true. Practice Based Commissioning (PBC) provides the opportunity for primary care professionals to engage in commissioning and re-designing services to better meet patients' needs.

The DoS on Choose and Book provides a 'shop window' of primary care services which can be easily accessed by referrers, to support PBC. Primary care services are currently shown on the locally commissioned primary care menu as well as on the 'search all' menu alongside appropriate secondary care services.

PCTs and referrers can use referral information available from Choose and Book reports and extracts to understand referral patterns and to support PBC.