

Introduction

When a patient tries to book an appointment in a service for which no slots are available, the 'Defer to Provider' function can be used to place the referral on an Appointment Slot Issues (ASIs) worklist, which is managed by the provider organisation. In some organisations, there appears to be confusion as to how providers should handle referrals on the ASI worklist and, in particular, whether they should ask referrers to re-send the referral information by fax and cancel the referral within Choose and Book. This guidance aims to clarify the processes and principles that should be followed.

Background

When Choose and Book was initiated in 2004, it introduced the concept of '*Book Now - Refer Later*', and the principle that, by actively booking an appointment, a patient is able to establish a 'legitimate relationship' between themselves and a provider organisation. Only once such a relationship is in place should a provider clinician be able to view the clinical information associated with that referral and either accept, reject or redirect the booked appointment.

Sometimes, however, there is a misplaced belief that the referral letter is required **before** booking an appointment, perhaps to make sure that the patient is seen in the correct clinic or with the correct urgency. This is often because booking staff are unfamiliar with the way in which Choose and Book works and the fact that, if the services are set up correctly within the Directory of Services (DoS), the referrer should already have assigned the patient to a suitable service and with the correct urgency. They need to be aware that it is simply the availability of appointment slots which is at fault and that once the patient has an appointment within Choose and Book, the same acceptance/rejection process can still be undertaken by the provider clinician.

Guidance and Principles

Detailed guidance on the management of ASIs within Choose and Book is available at: www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/staff/communications/fact/manageasi.pdf

In particular, the following points should be noted:

1. Patients on an ASI worklist should always be dealt with using Choose and Book by being contacted within four days of being placed on the work list and, wherever possible, be offered a choice of date and time of appointment.
2. Suitably trained staff in provider organisations should identify services where additional appointments are required and add the required appointment slots to their patient administration systems. They should then use the 'slot reservation' functionality within Choose and Book to keep these slots for patients on the ASI worklist. See guidance on the use of slot reservation: www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/staff/communications/fact/slotres.pdf
3. There is no need to see or assess a referral letter **before** an appointment is made: if providers had managed their demand and capacity effectively, the patient would already have been able to directly book an appointment, without their referral information having been reviewed.

4. Once an appointment has been booked, the provider clinician is then able to review the clinical information, decide on whether the referral was appropriate and check that the patient has been booked into the right clinic and with the correct urgency.
5. The action of booking an appointment within Choose and Book is what creates the legitimate relationship between a patient and that organisation. By accessing referral information *before* the appointment has been actively booked by the patient, staff in provider organisations may be considered to be in breach of Information Governance rules and patient confidentiality.
6. Clinical information will already have been sent electronically via Choose and Book and therefore asking referrers to send the information again, via fax or any other means, is time consuming, annoying and totally unnecessary.
7. Patients have already been inconvenienced by being denied the benefits of directly booking their appointment via Choose and Book and therefore any further delay to a process that was designed to improve their referral experience should not be tolerated.

Conclusions

This document has described how and why patients on an ASI worklist within a provider organisation should be booked into appointment slots using Choose and Book, without the need for their referral details to be viewed in advance. If further clarity is required on any of the principles or processes described in this document, the national Choose and Book team will be pleased to offer advice. Please contact them on chooseandbook@nhs.net