

Managing Appointment Slot Issues using Choose and Book Release 5.0



Introduction

This paper provides guidance on the processes that should be followed when patients or professional users of Choose and Book are unable to book an appointment. The most common reason for this is a lack of appointment slots being made available to Choose and Book by organisations providing directly bookable services. This occurs either because the provider is unable to match the demand for a service with sufficient available capacity (e.g. because they have reduced their polling range to meet *referral to treatment* timescales, without increasing capacity) or, in a small number of cases, because a technical issue is preventing an appointment slot from being shown or booked.

Release 5.0 of Choose and Book has changed the way in which Appointment Slot Issues are handled. This document outlines the new functionality and how it should be used to optimise the patient and professional user experience of Choose and Book. It replaces all previous ASI guidance and should be read in conjunction with the Release 5.0 training materials, which can be found on the Choose and Book website at: <http://www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/staff/training/materials>

Appointment Slot Issues – the effects

Patients should always be able to book an appointment at their chosen provider using the Choose and Book system. They can do this either at their referring practice, online via the internet, or by telephoning The Appointments Line (TAL). A lack of available slots prevents appointments from being booked and creates additional work for both providers and practices. They then have to undertake additional steps to ensure that the patient is able to book their appointment.

Every time a patient encounters an Appointment Slot Issue (ASI), it leaves them with a very poor experience of the referral/booking process within the NHS. This can lead to confusion, anger and frustration. This is even more apparent if they have tried on several occasions to book their appointment and have been unable to do so. It undermines several of the key objectives of Choose and Book, namely to provide patients with greater choice, certainty and control regarding the booking of their appointment.

Appointment Slot Issues also affect staff in referring organisations, since they are usually the ones who have to manage a confused or angry patient. The referring organisation may also have the added inconvenience and frustration of having to fax a referral letter that was previously added to Choose and Book as part of the original electronic referral process.

It is therefore hugely important for all those concerned that full responsibility and ownership of this problem is accepted by senior managers responsible for the scheduling of appointments within provider organisations. They must ensure that appointments are available to be booked without difficulty and in a timely manner, with Choose and Book being used as intended.

Appointment Slot Issues – who is responsible?

Referrers, Providers and Commissioners can all influence the likelihood of a patient experiencing an Appointment Slot Issue. This section details the responsibilities and best practice steps that can be taken to minimise the occurrence and reduce the unacceptable effects of Appointment Slot Issues.

Referrers

Wherever possible, referrers should offer the patient a shortlist that includes more than one service or provider. This could include selecting multiple sites at a particular provider. Shortlisted options should be clinically appropriate and agreed as suitable options with the patient as part of their right to Free Choice.

Referrers need to inform patients that:

- When there are no appointment slots available, there is a process within Choose and Book which enables their referral to be passed to their chosen provider, who will then contact them to arrange an appointment.
- If they try to book online and cannot see any available appointment slots, they will then be able to forward their referral details to the provider they choose from their shortlisted options.
- Where Appointment Slot Issues do occur, they can consider attending any other provider on their shortlist, if they wish to do so.

It is important to note that **patients should not normally need to contact or return to their referring practice when they experience an Appointment Slot Issue**. However, there are a few exceptions to this:

- If the patient has received no contact from their chosen provider by the date stated on their appointment request (or given to them verbally by TAL). **In such cases, referrers need to know the correct procedure to report such instances to their Primary Care Trust (PCT)/Practice Based Commissioner (PBC) Commissioning Lead, who should take action on their behalf.**
- If the appointments available to the patient are not convenient for a variety of reasons and there are no alternative providers on their shortlist. **In such cases, the referrer should discuss alternative providers with the patient.**

Providers

It is recognised that providers often experience significant difficulties in guaranteeing sufficient capacity to meet the demand of patients who have chosen to attend their hospital. It is evident that many are significantly reducing their slot polling ranges for Choose and Book in the belief that this will help them meet minimum waiting times. However, **reducing slot poll lengths without increasing capacity at the same time simply means that patients cannot book their appointments directly through Choose and Book**. This is unacceptable, as these patients will instead have to go through the Appointment Slot Issues process. It also compounds waits by creating a backlog of patients whose waiting time has already started and creates a significant amount of avoidable administrative work.

It must be noted that the 'clock' start date for waiting time monitoring is the **date on which the referral details are forwarded to the patient's chosen provider**, i.e. when the patient's unique booking reference number (UBRN) appears on the provider's ASI worklist. It is **NOT** the date when the provider contacts the patient with an available appointment. If the referral is being sent initially through a Clinical Assessment Service (CAS), then the waiting time starts from the date on which the assessment appointment is booked.

Providers must remember that:

- They are contractually required to ensure that sufficient appointment slots for first outpatient appointments are available on Choose and Book.
- All NHS organisations must have systems in place to promote equality and support all patients in the booking of their outpatient appointments.
- They are obliged to accept all clinically appropriate referrals and cannot turn patients away because they are not able to treat them within waiting time targets.
- The waiting time clock starts as soon as the UBRN appears on the provider's ASI worklist within Choose and Book.

Commissioners

Managing demand for a service is a shared responsibility between commissioners and providers. They need to work together to ensure that, where appropriate, a patient is treated at their first choice of provider.

- Under the NHS Constitution, Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) have a legal obligation to ensure that patients can fulfil their entitlement to Free Choice.
- PCTs must put the necessary systems in place to offer and support choice and allow patients to book appointments.
- Commissioners within PCTs must check the availability of appointment slots at their local providers to ensure that appointments are available and can easily be directly booked.
- Commissioners must actively manage their contracts with provider organisations that are failing to make sufficient slots available.

Summary of the changes in Release 5.0

Prior to Release 5.0 of Choose and Book, when a patient wished to book an appointment within a service that had no available appointments, or where there were technical issues preventing the booking from being made, they had to telephone The Appointments Line (TAL). The TAL operator noted the patient's details and transferred them to an email, which was sent to the chosen provider each evening. This process was outside of Choose and Book and could not be monitored by patients or their referring practices.

Following Release 5.0 of Choose and Book, when a patient attempts to book an appointment either at the referring practice, by telephone (via The Appointments Line) or online, (via the Patient Web Application) then **IF**:

- no appointment slot is available within their chosen service(s),
- or a technical issue prevents booking.

then **THE REQUEST CAN BE 'DEFERRED' TO THE PROVIDER.**

This means that the UBRN will appear immediately on the new provider **Appointment Slot Issues worklist**, giving all the necessary details for the patient to be contacted and their appointment arranged within Choose and Book.

How has Release 5.0 changed the ASI process for referrers?

When a referrer attempts to book an appointment for a patient and there are no slots available, they will now have the opportunity to defer the responsibility for booking the appointment to the patient's chosen provider. The referrer will have a new button on the appointment search screen (the '**Defer to Provider**' button – see Fig 1) which will allow the referral to be sent to one of the providers that have no appointments available. It should be noted that if appointments **are** available to be booked, but are not suitable or convenient for the patient, then the referral **CAN NOT** be deferred to the provider.

Once the referrer has selected the 'defer to provider' option, the patient must choose which of the services with no slots they would like to be referred to, by selecting **one** of the radio buttons on the 'deferral options details' screen, as shown in Fig 2:

The referrer will then be able to monitor the status of their patient's referral via the Patient Activity worklist, which will show the UBRN as 'Deferred to Provider' until it is booked.

From the new 'Deferral Options Summary' screen the referrer can confirm the patient's choice of provider and print the new Appointment Request letter. Both this screen and the letter will indicate a **date by when the patient should have heard** from their chosen provider, and will be based on the priority of the referral. This is shown in the red section of Fig 3:

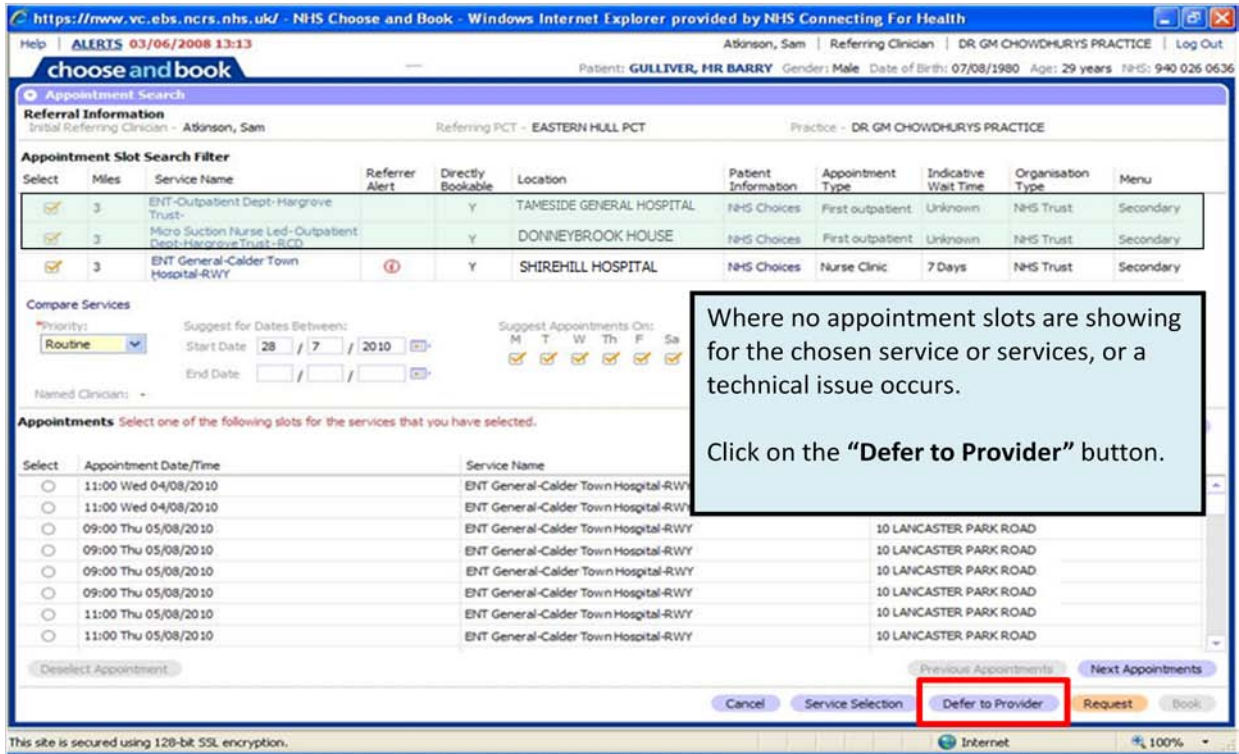


Fig 1. Appointment Search Screen, showing Defer to Provider Button

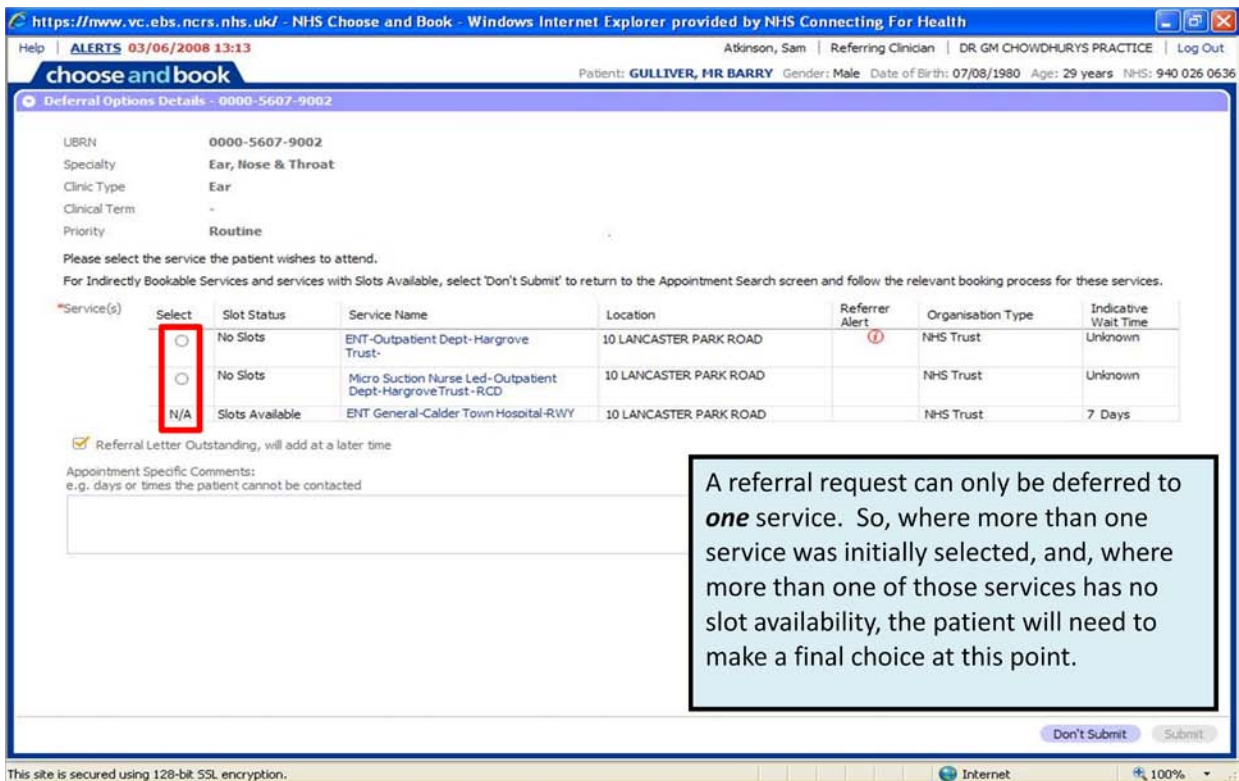


Fig 2. Deferral Options Details, showing radio buttons to select service

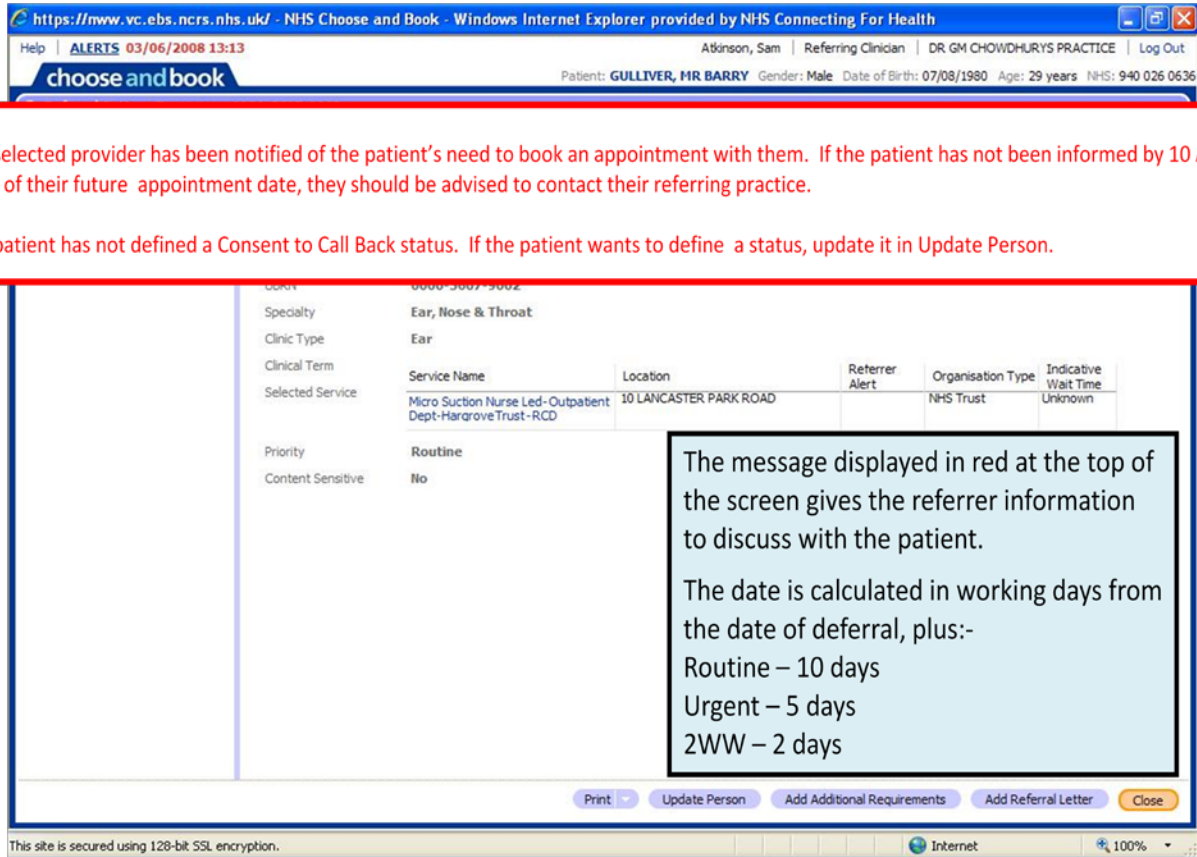


Fig 3. Deferral Options Summary, showing date by which patient should have been contacted

Check Patient Details box

To support the new ASI functionality, Choose and Book will now display a warning dialogue box to prompt the user to confirm the patient's contact details. This is essential to ensure that providers are able to contact patients promptly to book their appointments.

The Check Patient Details dialogue box (see Fig 4) will only appear once for a referrer, either when generating an appointment request (i.e. no booking attempt is made) or when attempting to book an appointment. In this case it will either appear when the appointment is successfully booked or when the 'defer to provider' button has been pressed.

If a different user is processing the booking or rebooking (e.g. TAL) and there are no slots available, then, if they Defer to Provider, the Check Patient Details Dialogue box will also appear to re-confirm the patient's details.

Check Patient Details

Please ensure that the patient's details are correct. If they are not up to date, this may result in a delay to care. The patient needs to be aware that setting the Consent to Call Back to 'No' will prevent them from being contacted by telephone. If the patient's details are correct, click 'OK' to continue. If not, click 'Update Person'.

Patient Name:	GULLIVER, MR BARRY
Address:	44 Glencross Karachi Great Barr GLOS OL6 7RE
Consent to Call Back:	Yes
Telephone:	Primary Home: 01234 534433
Textphone:	-
Email:	-
Fax:	-

Update Person
OK

Fig 4. Check Patient Details dialogue box

How has Release 5.0 changed the ASI process for providers?

Following Release 5.0, providers of directly bookable services will no longer receive a daily e-mail from The Appointments Line (TAL) giving them details of patients who have been unable to book an appointment. Providers will instead have a new worklist, the 'Appointment Slot Issues' worklist where all referrals which have been deferred to their service will immediately appear.

In line with previous guidance on the management of Appointment Slot Issues, it is imperative that **patients are contacted within 4 working days of their details appearing on the ASI worklist**. A convenient appointment can then be booked well in advance of the date given to them when their referral was deferred (this date would be printed on the appointment request, or given verbally by TAL).

Above all, providers **MUST NOT** wait until the UBRN received date turns **RED** on their worklist before they take action. When the date in this column turns red it means that the date given to the patient has already passed and it is likely that the patient will be in the process of contacting their referrer to say that they have not received an appointment.

In order for the new ASI functionality to work effectively, senior managers in provider organisations **MUST** ensure that all staff managing the ASI worklists are appropriately trained, are in the correct workgroups, and have the necessary skills and authority to manage these referrals effectively, within the required timescales.

New provider ASI worklist:

UBRN	Priority	Referral First Booked/ASI	UBRN Received	Service Name	Speciality	Reason	NHS Number	Patient Name	Last Contact Date/Time
0000-5603-0003	2 Week Wait	25/06/2010	25/06/2010	506-2.3 - No Slots 1 (NOOR TEST ONLY)	Ear, Nose & Throat	No Slots	940 026 0334	STEVENSON, MR LEE W	-
0000-5603-5012	2 Week Wait	30/06/2010	30/06/2010	506-2.7.1 - Reserved Slots (NOOR TEST ONLY) Duplicate 1	Ear, Nose & Throat	No Slots	940 026 0520	STEVENSON, MR LEE W	-
0000-5603-5008	Urgent	30/06/2010	30/06/2010	506-2.3 - No Slots 1 (NOOR TEST ONLY)	Ear, Nose & Throat	No Slots	940 026 0520	STEVENSON, MR LEE W	-
0000-5602-7038	Routine	24/06/2010	25/06/2010	506-2.3 - No Slots 1 (NOOR TEST ONLY)	Ear, Nose & Throat	No Slots	940 026 0334	STEVENSON, MR LEE W	-
0000-5602-7042	Routine	24/06/2010	24/06/2010	506-2.3 - No Slots 2 (NOOR TEST ONLY)	Ear, Nose & Throat	No Slots	940 026 0520	STEVENSON, MR LEE W	24/06/2010 17:00
0000-5602-9024	Routine	25/06/2010	25/06/2010	506-2.3 - No Slots 3 (NOOR TEST ONLY)	Ear, Nose & Throat	No Slots	940 026 0520	STEVENSON, MR LEE W	-
0000-5602-9027	Routine	25/06/2010	25/06/2010	506-2.3 - Slots Unavailable (NOOR TEST ONLY)	Ear, Nose & Throat	Slot Unavailable	940 026 0520	STEVENSON, MR LEE W	-
0000-5603-0001	Routine	25/06/2010	29/06/2010	506-2.7.1 - Protected Slots (NOOR TEST ONLY) duplicate 1	Ear, Nose & Throat	No Slots	940 026 0520	STEVENSON, MR LEE W	-
0000-5603-0004	Routine	25/06/2010	25/06/2010	506-2.3 - No Slots 1 (NOOR TEST ONLY)	Ear, Nose & Throat	No Slots	940 026 0520	STEVENSON, MR LEE W	-
0000-5603-4176	Routine	29/06/2010	29/06/2010	506-2.3 - No Slots 1 (NOOR TEST ONLY)	Ear, Nose & Throat	No Slots	940 026 0334	STEVENSON, MR LEE W	-

Fig 5. Provider ASI Worklist

From the new ASI worklist (see Fig 5) providers can perform the following actions:

- book appointment
- cancel request
- record ASI contact
- add additional requirements
- view request
- view history
- book appointment

Book Appointment

This will open the 'Appointment Search Screen', from where it is possible to book an appointment:

- into an ordinary, available slot
- into a reserved slot, - (existing slot reservation functionality has been enhanced to allow referrals on the ASI worklist to be booked into reserved slots)
- into a slot within the 'slot protection time'.

It is worth noting that where named clinician functionality has been used to search for services and an ASI has been experienced, this may be because there are no appointments available for the named clinician, but there may well be appointments still available within the service for generic referrals. Where a referrer has used a named clinician to search for

services this will be displayed on the Deferral Options Summary screen and also on the Appointment Search screen.

Cancel Request

Wherever possible the patient should have their appointment booked within Choose and Book. If this is not possible and the appointment has to be booked outside of Choose and Book, then the appointment request within Choose and Book **must** be cancelled and the reason '*Patient booked outside Choose and Book*' should be selected from the list (see Fig 6). It is good practice to also enter the date and time of the new appointment in the accompanying free text box. This information will be available to all professional users who wish to view the history of the referral.

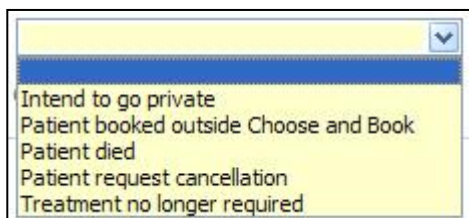


Fig 6. Request Cancellation Reasons

Record ASI contact

Release 5.0 of Choose and Book provides a new feature enabling a record to be made of a contact (or attempted contact) with a patient whose referral is in the ASI process. The new '**Record ASI Contact**' option will allow free text relating to the contact to be recorded and be readily available to others managing the process.

ASI contacts are recorded in the history of the UBRN and are always available from any worklist that allows users to view the history. This includes the ASI worklist.

Selecting the 'Record ASI Contact' action displays the screen shown in Fig 7:

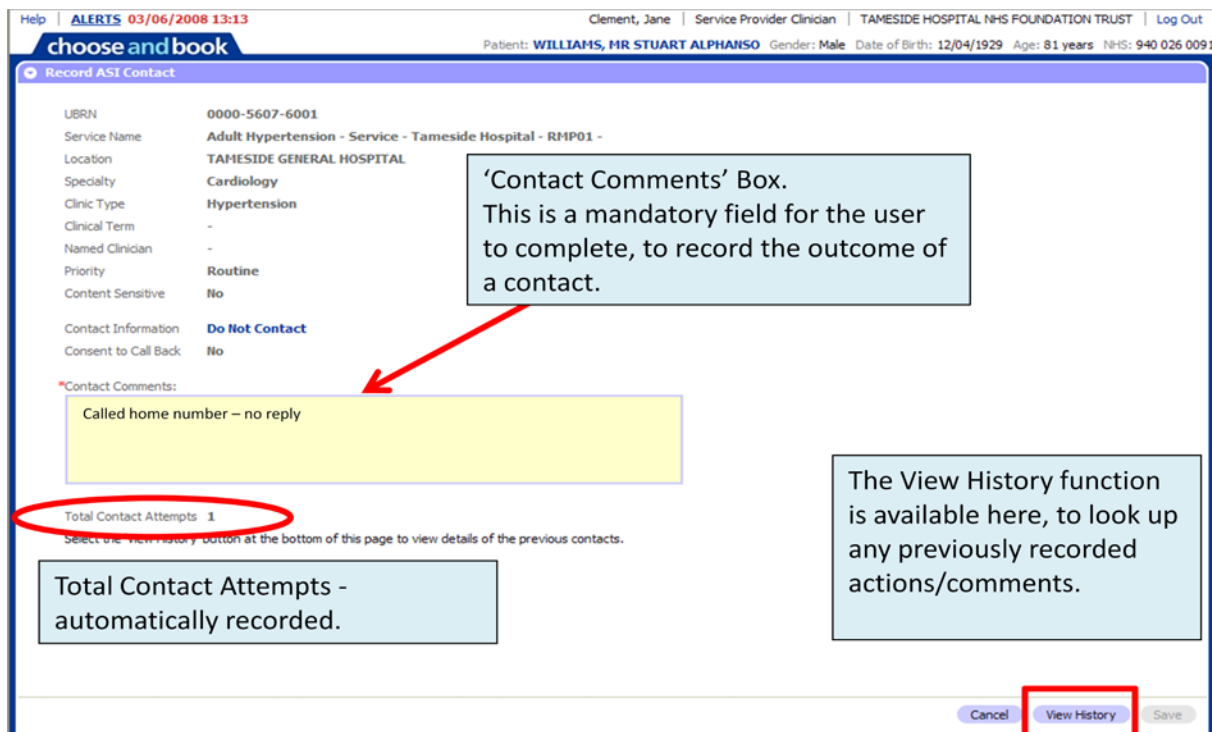


Fig 7. Record ASI Contact screen

This new functionality should help providers manage their ASI worklists and maintain a record within Choose and Book of all attempts to contact a patient in order to book their appointment. Referrers and other users accessing the patient history will also be able to see both the number of attempted contacts and the recorded outcome of each.

Important points to note:

1. As with current Choose and Book functionality the referral information, or any attached referral letter, will **not** be visible within the provider organisation until an appointment has been booked within Choose and Book.
2. The extension of the Slot Reservation functionality for referrals from the ASI worklist should enable providers to keep the UBRN within Choose and Book and therefore minimise the need to contact referring practices to request the referral information be faxed to them. It is advisable for providers who use this functionality to also extend their slot polling range to ensure the same number of appointment slots remain available to Choose and Book. For example, if you have your slot reservation for a service set at two days, it would be good practice to extend the polling range for that service for two days.
3. While the patient is in the ASI process ('Deferred to Provider') reminder letters will be suspended. This will help to alleviate the frustration currently experienced by patients who have tried to book an appointment, been told that the provider will contact them, and who then receive a letter reminding them to book their appointment.
4. Previously, it was advised NOT to allow two week wait (2WW) referrals to enter the ASI process, due to the lengthy manual processes involved. However, with the new

functionality introduced in Release 5.0, if a 2WW referral is entered into the ASI process, it will appear immediately at the top of the provider's ASI worklist. The patient will be given a date two working days after the referral has been deferred, by which time they should either have been contacted by the provider organisation or will be instructed to make contact again with their referrer.

Management Information

The correct use of data and information contained within Choose and Book is fundamental to the management of Appointment Slot Issues by both commissioners and providers. It enables the incidence of Appointment Slot Issues to be calculated, monitored and discussed at national, regional and local levels.

The **'weekly slot issues' report** enables providers and commissioners to look at Appointment Slot Issues by type, by specialty and over time. Importantly, it helps to compare the number of Appointment Slot Issues with the number of overall bookings, showing this as a ratio. All providers should review this report regularly to understand their current appointment slot issues position and track their progress over time.

There are two enquiries in Choose and Book which provide real-time information on used and unused slots by specialty, clinic type and priority over a specified time period. One is available to those with a service definer role within provider organisations and the other to those with a commissioner role, showing information for a specified provider.

There are two monthly reports on Choose and Book, which are available to those with an Information Analyst role. These show Past Slot Utilisation (SPR09) and Future Slot Utilisation (SPR10) at specialty and service level. In the Future Slot Utilisation report, available slots, appointments booked via Choose and Book, and unused slots are displayed by priority and week over a thirteen-week period. In the Past Slot Utilisation report, available slots, appointments booked via Choose and Book, and unused slots are displayed by priority and week for the last six weeks.

Frequently Asked Questions on the new ASI process:

When will the Check Patient Details dialogue box appear?

The Check Patient Details dialogue box will only appear once for a referrer, either when generating an appointment request (i.e. no booking attempt is made) or when attempting to book an appointment, in which case it will either appear when the appointment is successfully booked or when the defer button has been pressed. If a different user is processing the booking or rebooking (e.g. TAL) and there are no slots available, then, if they Defer to Provider, the Check Patient Details dialogue box will also appear to re-confirm the patient's details.

Will referrals that have already been received by a provider organisation via the daily TAL emails be retrospectively put onto the ASI worklist immediately after Release 5.0?

No. It is good practice to ensure that existing ASIs, already notified to the provider, are dealt with prior to Release 5.0.

If a Clinical Assessment Service (CAS) uses the Defer to Provider functionality, which work lists will the UBRN appear on?

It will appear on the CAS Appointments for Booking Worklist, and the onward provider's ASI worklist.

If a UBRN has already been deferred and the patient then chooses another service with the same provider (for the same UBRN) and is subsequently deferred again, will this register as two ASIs?

Yes. This will count as two slot issues, but the UBRN will only appear once on the work list for action.

If a referral is deferred for a second time, will a new date appear on the provider's ASI work list?

Yes. The UBRN will have the date of the second deferral, but the date of the original ASI will appear in the 'UBRN first booked/ASI' column.

How is the date and time populated in the ASI worklist to tell when the patient was last contacted?

The action 'Record ASI contact' will automatically populate the worklist with the date and time of this action.

If patient details are updated in the Patient Demographics Service (PDS), following the Check Patient Details dialogue box, will the integrated GP system also be updated?

No. This will not happen automatically, but the next time the patient is accessed via the integrated GP system it will trigger a synchronisation with the PDS, which will retrieve the updated demographics.

When multiple providers have been shortlisted, but only a few of them have been selected in order to search for appointment slots, then, if Deferring to Provider, will it be the complete original shortlist that is displayed?

Yes, the referral can be deferred to any provider on the original shortlist that has no slots available.

Currently, in the Patient Web Application the patient can only rebook into the service where they originally booked. However, The Appointments Line (TAL) or referring organisation is able to rebook a patient into any service from the original shortlist. Will this be the same in Release 5.0?

Yes.

If a patient is already in the ASI process and appointment comments were originally added (e.g. by the TAL operator or the patient themselves), can those comments be amended or updated if they call TAL again?

No. Extra comments can only be added if the referral is deferred a second time. The original comments will remain visible via the history, but cannot be amended.

How will I know if a patient is already in the ASI process?

The status of the patient will read 'Deferred to Provider'.

Can TAL take a patient off an ASI list? i.e. stop the deferral process without cancelling the request?

No. There are only three possible actions that can be carried out on a referral that has been deferred to a provider:

1. book an appointment
2. defer again
3. cancel request

Can comments entered via the Patient Web Application (PWA) be seen by TAL if the patient rings to try and change their option or book an appointment?

Yes. TAL can see comments in the history of the UBRN, but if the patient is re-entered into the ASI process only new comments can be added.

If a referrer has searched using named clinician, will the named clinician be visible on the PWA?

Yes, it will show with a warning message to indicate that the patient may see a member of the consultant's team. If no named clinician is selected then the field will not be displayed on the PWA.

Where a user (e.g. a TAL operator) needs to cancel and rebook an appointment, will the slot that is about to be cancelled become an available slot, therefore preventing the referral from entering into the ASI process?

No. The currently booked appointment will only be cancelled in Choose and Book once a new slot is booked or by Deferring to Provider. Only then will the original slot become available again.

If a patient rings TAL for a second (or subsequent) time after the date by which they should have been contacted by the provider, what should the TAL operator do?

The original deferral information given to the patient will have told them to contact their referring organisation if they had not heard from the provider by a specific date. If, however, after this date, they decide to contact TAL again, the TAL operator can offer to search for appointments again, either at the chosen provider or at another provider from the original shortlist. If no appointments are available then the patient should be advised to follow the original instructions (i.e. contact their referring organisation).

What happens to the waiting time (clock) start date if a patient chooses a different provider?

This is the same as the current process. The waiting time will start from the date that the UBRN first appears on an ASI work list. The patient can change provider, if they wish to, however their waiting time continues from the date they first appeared on the original provider's ASI work list. This will appear in the 'UBRN first booked/ASI' column, so any provider will know the clock start date.

If a referral has been deferred to a provider, will the TAL operator be able to see the date by which the patient should have been contacted by the provider?

Yes. By selecting the option 'view request' in the Actions reveal.

When a CAS defers to provider which date will be shown in the 'Referral first booked/ASI' column?

The date when the appointment was booked into the CAS will be shown on the 'Referral First Booked/ASI column' on both the Appointments for Booking worklist (at the CAS) and the ASI worklist at the provider. The date on which the CAS defers to the provider will be shown on the providers ASI worklist in the 'UBRN received' column.

Can a UBRN ever be on both the ASI worklist and the Appointments for Booking worklist within the same organisation? (Both worklists are appointments waiting to be booked)

In general this shouldn't happen; however, there are two scenarios when this might happen:

1. When a referral is onward referred from a CAS to a Service in the same provider organisation and ends up in the ASI Process (because the CAS has selected 'Defer to Provider'), then, if the Service Provider user belongs (via workgroups) to both services, the UBRN will be on their Appointments for Booking worklist and their ASI worklist.
2. When a referral is re-directed from one Service to another in the same provider organisation and ends up in the ASI Process (because the first service has selected 'Defer to Provider'), then, if the Service Provider user belongs (via workgroups) to both services, the UBRN will be on their Appointments for Booking worklist and their ASI worklist.