

Improving the patient's referral to treatment pathway Bassetlaw local health community

Doncaster and Bassetlaw Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Healthcare is complex and changes rapidly in response to a wide range of political, economic, social and technological trends. Bassetlaw local health community has recognised the need to anticipate these developments in order to provide services in the short, medium and long term which acknowledge these trends while responding to the needs of patients.

The Trust is a first-wave foundation trust and serves a large number of people who live in a wide range of communities throughout Doncaster, Bassetlaw, and neighbouring areas. The Trust provides a range of clinical services across five hospitals: Doncaster Royal Infirmary, Bassetlaw District General Hospital, Montagu Hospital, Tickhill Road Hospital, and Retford Hospital. The Trust has been using Choose and Book since September 2005, and by August 2008, 63% of all referrals were received via Choose and Book.

Over the past few years the NHS has been changing to give patients greater choice and flexibility in how they are treated. One IT system and service which has supported this change is Choose and Book. Choose and Book allows patients to choose from a range



Retford Primary Care Centre

of hospitals and to book an appointment with a consultant or specialist at a date and time convenient to them.

Processing referrals more quickly

From the patient's perspective, Choose and Book has the ability to significantly reduce the delay between the general practitioner (GP) confirming with them that a specialist appointment is necessary

and the booking of that appointment. The shift in responsibility for the booking of appointments from the provider (as in the paper world) to referrer (as in Choose and Book) has impacted the patient experience. The patient's visit to the GP becomes more complete and reassuring for those that are able to book their appointment with the GP or practice administrative staff before they leave.

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Improving the patient's referral to treatment pathway

As an indication of the proportion of patients that have had this opportunity, *figure 1 (right)* illustrates the number of electronic referrals that were booked by a GP or practice administrative staff member.

Improving service delivery

The development of a new and innovative role emerged from Doncaster's Service Improvement review of the referral process, and this has been one of the Trust's most significant successes. Whilst refining the pathway, it became apparent that dealing with Choose and Book referrals through the normal medical records process was unlikely to contribute to an improved referral process. The Trust developed the role of Out Patient Co-ordinators (OPCs) and attached these individuals to each Directorate involved in delivering out-patient services. In effect, these individuals, who already had significant experience in the booking process, manage the referral pathway specialty by specialty, ensuring that appointment slot management is effective and that referrals into the service are managed in a timely way.

At the request of Primary Care Trust's, OPCs now inform GP practices on a weekly basis of inappropriate referrals. Practice and Primary Care Trust colleagues can contact the OPCs for advice or information on referral and for any problems arising from the Directory of Services (DoS).

It could be hypothesised that this increased efficiency in the booking pathway and the consequent improvements in patient convenience has contributed to a reduction in the Did Not Attend (DNA) rate as evidenced by the survey findings described in *figure 2 (right)*.

Breakdown of Choose and Book appointments by the type of person making the appointment

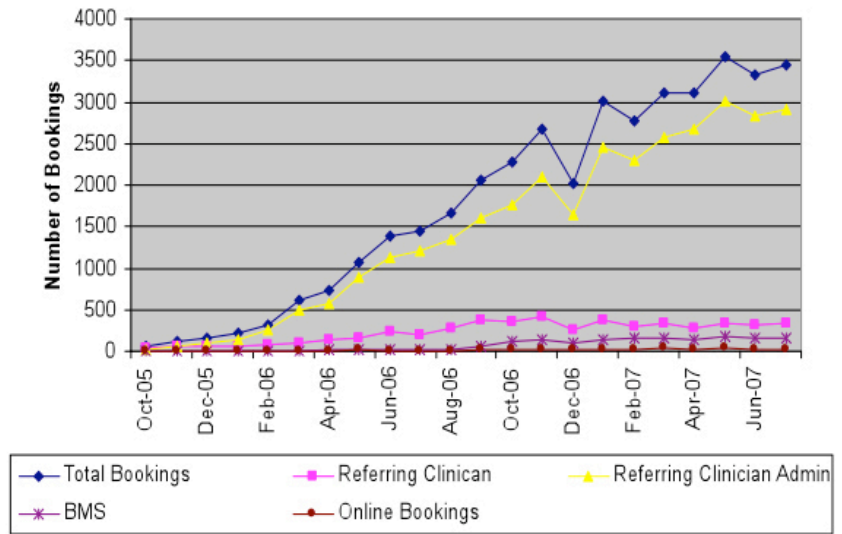


Figure 1

Choose and Book - DNAs

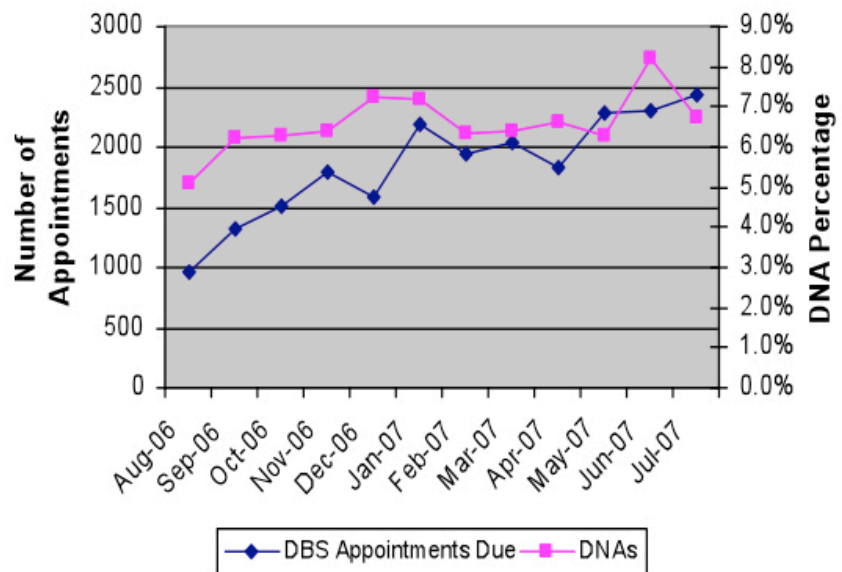
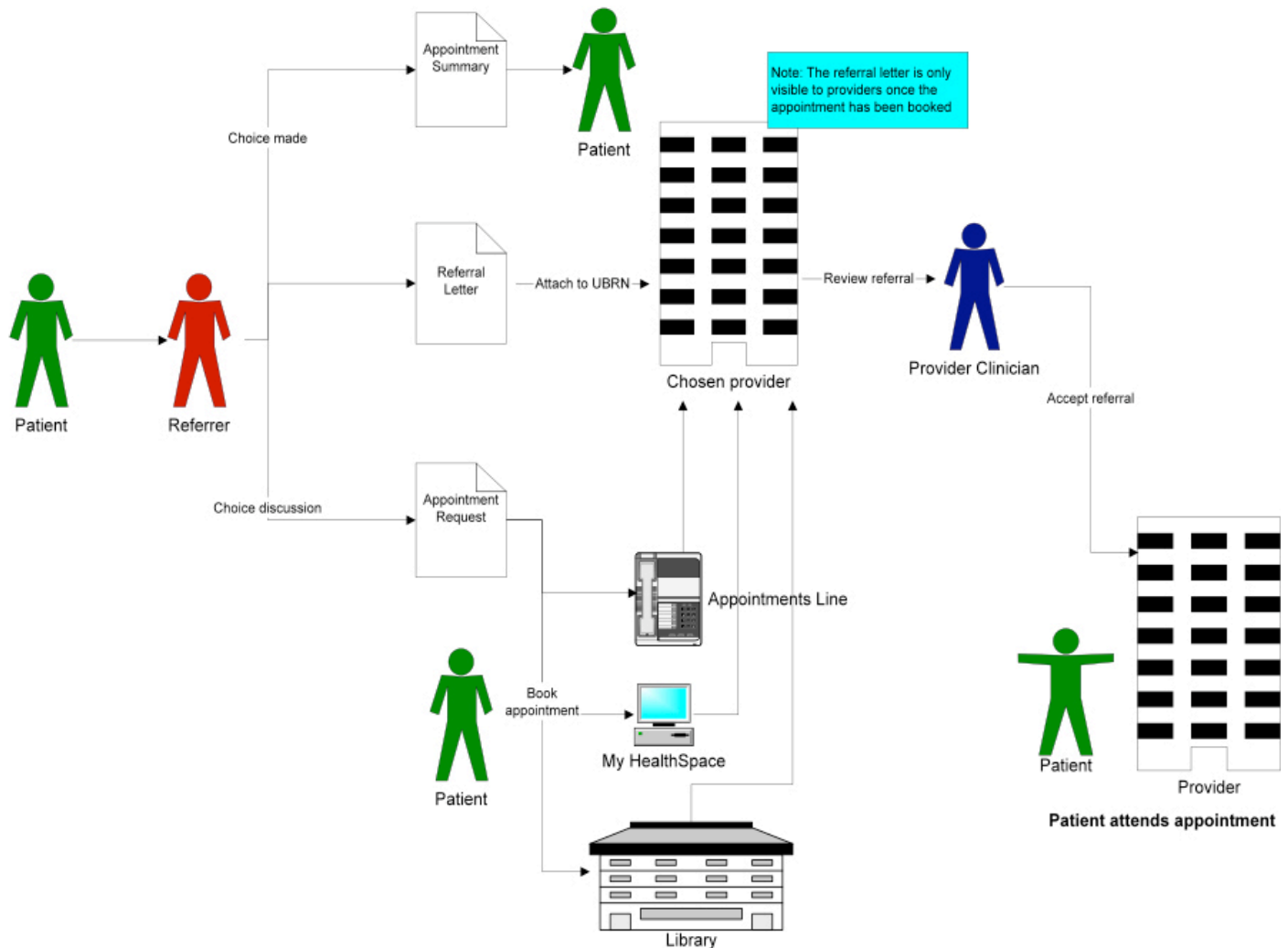


Figure 2

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The patient's pathway from referral to treatment



Choose and Book's role in Primary Care

Choose and Book has helped improve communication between primary and secondary care and has helped create a more transparent pathway when patients are referred electronically. Patients have greater certainty and peace of mind over the place, date and time of their booked appointment. They also receive their appointment confirmation in a more timely manner.

The referrer's experience

The Tall Trees Practice in Retford is part of Bassetlaw Primary Care Trust. Currently 76 per cent of the PCT's referrals are made through Choose and Book.

Dr Hobson uses Choose and Book to refer patients for outpatient appointments.

"I don't find that Choose and Book has made a massive difference to my work as a GP, but it has made a massive difference for my patients. They like it a lot because they get the date, time and place of their outpatient appointment much more quickly."



Dr Phil Hobson, Tall Trees Practice

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Kathryn Watkinson, Choose and Book Clerk at Tall Trees Practice

Kathryn Watkinson is the Choose and Book clerk at Tall Trees Practice. Kathryn joined the Tall Trees Practice when Choose and Book was first introduced. "It didn't go as smoothly as the PCT originally hoped" she said. "Although patients really liked the system, the GPs were much less keen. Only one of our GPs really likes using computers – our GPs much prefer dealing with patients. So we thought about how to find a way to work with Choose and Book that was easy for the GPs and still enabled patients to get the time and date of their outpatient referral appointment as fast as possible."

Kathryn took Choose and Book on as a project when a colleague returned from maternity leave. The process she developed enables the GPs at Tall Trees to work almost as they did before.

"We work around what the GPs prefer – Dr Jarvis uses the Choose and Book system himself during the consultation, but Dr Gilbert, Dr Brown and Dr Hobson follow the process we set up and I do the bookings on their behalf."

"I get the choice of appointments for each patient up on the system and we talk on the phone about which they would prefer. I have a quiet space away from the main reception area to do the phone calls, but when we move to our new modern premises soon, patients will be able to come to me and do their booking before they leave the surgery."

"Sometimes the doctor is quite precise about which consultants he thinks the patient should see, but usually we offer patients as wide a choice as we can. Most of them still want the earliest appointment, as close as possible to home! I send out details about the hospital if the patient wants me to, but because most of our referrals are local, I don't have to do that very often."

"I get the choice of appointments for each patient up on the system and we talk on the phone about which they would prefer."

Kathryn Watkinson

Choose and Book clerk at Tall Trees Practice

Kathryn is pleased that hospitals are now more linked in with Choose and Book. "Not having all the appointment slots for each specialty on Choose and Book was a real problem at first. Now, thankfully, 90 per cent are on the system. There are different ways of booking into those specialities and you have to get used to that, but it's so much better and it does work."

Dr Hobson is happy to use Choose and Book according to the practice's own preference. He says: "At Tall Trees, the practice has adapted its processes around Choose and Book to suit the way its GPs prefer to work, whilst at the same time ensuring patients have all the benefits of electronic booking." Dr Hobson said "Tall Trees' GPs are able to work pretty much as we did before. We dictate the referral and our colleagues take it from there. This is a helpful way to work with Choose and Book in practices where there are GPs who are not particularly confident about, or keen to use, new technology."

Kathryn said "Any major IT upgrade such as Choose and Book was always going to be a challenge. All the effort has been worthwhile. It has been a lot of work to get it right, but I've enjoyed the challenge of the job. Choose and Book is good because nine out of ten people get their appointment much earlier than they thought they would. Also patients prefer to be able to fit their hospital visit around their lives and routines."

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“When I saw the doctor he suggested physiotherapy and that I could be referred using Choose and Book. I have to admit, I’d never heard of it but I was really impressed with how it worked though.”

Amanda Ealing
Patient

The patient’s experience

Amanda Ealing is a Retford resident who has benefited from Choose and Book. Amanda works as a day care organiser for social services, while being the busy mother of two football mad boys Ben and Ashley who she regularly takes to training sessions and matches. Amanda visited Dr Hobson at Tall Trees Practice because she had an irritating pain in her shoulder.

“I’ve got a busy life and my shoulder hurt and I wanted to get it fixed as rapidly as I could,” says 46 year old Amanda. “When I saw the doctor he suggested physiotherapy and that I could be referred using Choose and Book. I have to admit, I’d never heard of it but I was really impressed with how it worked though.”

“I had thought it would be weeks and weeks before I would get a letter with my appointment, but it was all done so quickly. Dr Hobson told me to phone Kathryn, the Choose and Book clerk in the practice the next day. I did and she booked my appointment there and then. It was really convenient and fitted in with our daily routine.”

Amanda was referred to Retford Hospital who provide a range of outpatient and community services and is another busy hospital in the Trust.



Amanda Ealing, patient

Choose and Book’s role in secondary care

Bassetlaw Hospital, Worksop, is one of the key hospitals within DBHFT and each year, the hospital treats around 33,000 patients. It is also close to the boundaries of four counties and whilst the majority of referrals are from local GPs, patients are increasingly being referred from further afield.

The Deputy Records Manager’s experience

Judy Lane is the Deputy Records Manager at Bassetlaw Hospital and when a patient makes an appointment at Bassetlaw Hospital using Choose and Book, its one of Judy’s nine strong team of booking clerks and co-ordinators who ensure the referral is checked by the appropriate specialist and accepted, rejected or redirected.

The team co-ordinates all the hospital’s electronic bookings, together with a decreasing number of paper referrals. One local GP practice is now achieving 96 per cent of its referrals into Bassetlaw using electronic booking.

“Choose and Book works well for us at Bassetlaw because we’ve cleaned up our manual systems, tackled the ‘Did Not Attend’ issue and improved clinic management,” says Judy, who leads on bookings for the hospital.

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Judy Lane, Deputy Records Manager at Bassetlaw Hospital

Directory of Services

When set up correctly, the Directory of Services (DoS) is an efficient tool which ensures that patients are referred to the most clinically appropriate service for their condition. A successful DoS is dependent on secondary care working with primary care to ensure that their local services are described in a way that is clear and easy to understand by referring GPs.

By ensuring that the DoS correctly reflects their service locally, consultants can help prevent patients going to the wrong clinic.

A particular specialist activity can be made visible within Choose and Book by making this clear in the service name. In addition to the high level guidance available to help select such services, there are also service details within Choose and Book that highlight the particular circumstances under which these clinics may operate. This is available to the referring GP to view. This may include conditions or diagnoses which are treated or excluded, and any special tests and investigations which may be required prior to seeing the patient in the clinic. This guidance can contain local or national protocols and guidelines, which can often be accessed by hyperlinks.

Choose and Book also offers referring clinicians a 'key word' search function where referring clinicians input the most appropriate words to describe their patient's condition. These are then matched to clinically appropriate services where similar key words have been associated.



Carol Miller, Outpatient Administration Manager, Bassetlaw Hospital

Setting up the Directory of Services locally The Outpatient Administration Manager's experience

Carol Miller is the Outpatient administration manager at Bassetlaw Hospital and knows everything there is to know about Bassetlaw Hospital's DoS. Carol describes the Directory as the 'yellow pages' for the hospital. "Everything that can be booked using Choose and Book has to be on the Directory," she explains. Carol established the 150 different sections which make up the Directory, and also manages the regular changes that need to be made so that electronic bookings work effectively for patients, GPs and clinics.

The Directory lists all the different departments in the hospital to which patients can be referred. Within each department it shows all the individuals and the procedures they can perform, together with their particular specialisms.

"We're now achieving 70 per cent of our bookings through Choose and Book and I can't see any reason why we can't reach nearer 100 per cent. The only specialties which aren't on the directory now are pregnancy terminations and cardiology. We have worked with our local GPs and our different clinics and consultants to ensure our Directory can be used effectively."

"Everything that can be booked using Choose and Book has to be on the Directory"

Carol Miller
Outpatient Administration Manager, Bassetlaw Hospital

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Mr Mubashir, Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon, Bassetlaw Hospital

Overcoming key challenges

The consultant's experience

Mr Mubashir is a Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon at Bassetlaw Hospital. Mr Mubashir has worked at the hospital for seven years. He is convinced of the benefits of Choose and Book for his patients, but is aware of some of the challenges that need to be overcome to get the most out of Choose and Book.

Key issues have been around inappropriate referrals and Did Not Attends (DNAs). Mr Mubashir believes that improving communication and understanding are key to overcoming these challenges. Progress has been made, but there is still work to do.

"The 'DNA' issue has been tackled very successfully in Bassetlaw through a combination of patients booking a convenient appointment through Choose and Book, and by secondary care adopting a strict policy with those who, despite choosing the time and date of their appointment, then fail to attend. If a patient does

not attend for an appointment booked through Choose and Book the system is set up to automatically discharge the patient and they are referred back to their GP to begin the referral process again. Patients are made aware of this and the number of Did Not Attends has dropped rapidly as a result. This approach has worked well. We had to get strict with DNAs for the benefit of all our other patients." said Mr Mubashir.

Choose and Book has won the support of trust staff

Despite the challenges, implementing Choose and Book has been worthwhile. The new IT system and service has brought benefits to both staff and patients. This is demonstrated by the recent feedback from Choose and Book users within the Doncaster & Bassetlaw LHC, particularly within primary care, where 65% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Choose and Book is a worthwhile initiative. Of those surveyed in Secondary Care 52% of respondents also agreed or strongly agreed that Choose and Book is worthwhile.

"The 'DNA' issue has been tackled very successfully in Bassetlaw through a combination of patients booking a convenient appointment through Choose and Book, and by secondary care adopting a strict policy with those who, despite choosing the time and date of their appointment, then fail to attend."

Mr Mubashir

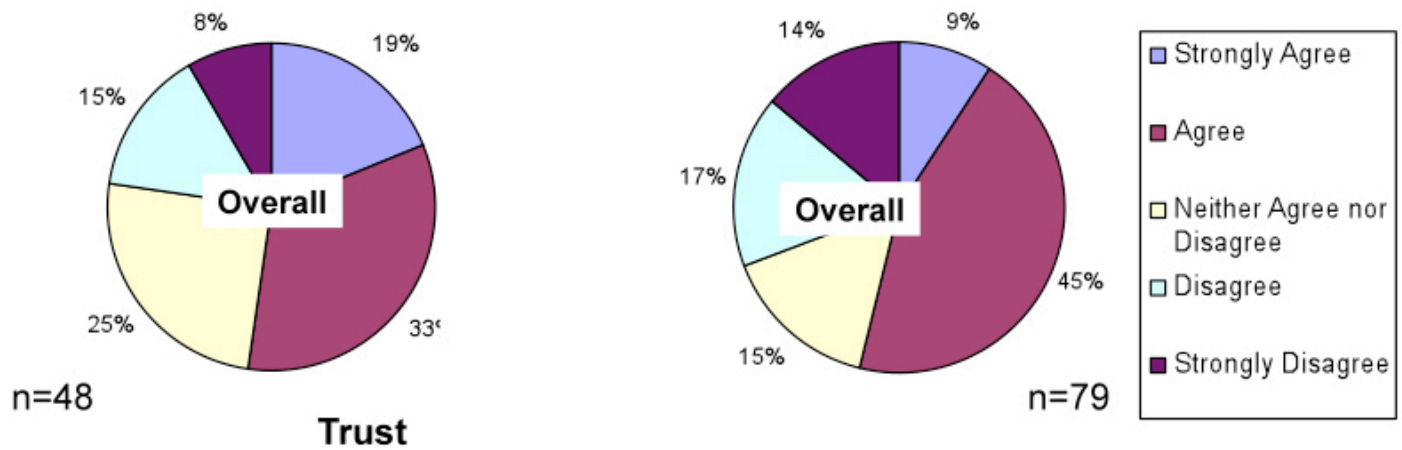
Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon, Bassetlaw Hospital.

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Support for Choose and Book Initiative – Do you feel Choose and Book has been a worthwhile initiative?



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