

Expanding coverage

Choose and Book is increasingly becoming the standard way for GPs to refer their patients to outpatient appointments in secondary care. Compared to a paper based system, Choose and Book provides the following benefits:

- Provides patients with certainty of a booked appointment date, time and place, which is convenient to them
- Removes unnecessary delays in the process for appointments being made which thereby supports delivery of the 18 weeks target
- Enables patients to be offered a choice of provider and provides patients with information to inform their choice such as waiting times and the facilities at the provider – for this reason, Choose and Book is a key enabler for the delivery of free choice
- Provides a more secure method of referral with a clear audit trail.

Many local health communities are now expanding the coverage of Choose and Book to ensure these benefits can be extended to other types of referrals. Coverage is being expanded through widening access in terms of the practitioners using Choose and Book to make referrals, and by extending the services published on Choose and Book to community based services.

If you wish to discuss expanding coverage of Choose and Book, please liaise with your local Choose and Book lead.

Expanding coverage to nurses and allied health professionals (AHPs) as referring clinicians

Increasingly local care pathways and protocols are enabling primary care nurses and AHPs to make their own referrals to both community based services and secondary care services. Only by using Choose and Book will these practitioners be able to offer patients the full choice of providers to which they are entitled with free choice as well as ensuring that these patients experience the benefits of an electronic booking system. As Choose and Book coverage extends to community based services, increasing numbers of nurses and AHPs will receive referrals through Choose and Book for services they deliver. It clearly makes sense for these practitioners to also make their referrals using Choose and Book.

Work is underway to ensure that in future, referring clinicians on Choose and Book can be associated with PCTs as well as GP practices. In the meantime, nurses and AHPs have to be associated with a GP practice to be able refer using Choose and Book.

Sara Skelton, a nurse practitioner employed by Eastern and Coastal Kent PCT, describes her experience of using Choose and Book to make referrals. *"I work at a GP practice run by our PCT from St Stephen's Health Centre in Ashford. We operate a triage system at the practice for acute conditions with patients being referred to myself or a GP depending on their symptoms. I use Choose and Book in the same way as the GPs for making referrals. Generally, I find patients love it. Patients like having the control over how they get their appointments rather than waiting to be contacted."*

Sarah thinks coverage should continue expanding to further nurses and AHPs - *"I think the PCT are happy for more nurses and AHPs to use Choose and Book to make referrals. GP practices and health centres are only beginning to consider this now as using Choose and Book has become standard for GPs. I'd say bring it on. As long as they have access to a computer when they see patients it makes sense for nurses and AHPs to refer using Choose and Book."*



Expanding coverage to community based services

PCTs and GP practices, through Practice Based Commissioning, are increasingly delivering services in primary care settings that have traditionally been delivered in secondary care. Referring patients through Choose and Book helps ensure that the utilisation of these services is optimised and provides PCTs and GP practices with valuable activity information to support business planning and service development.

How can we use Choose and Book for our community based services?

During October 2007, over 20,000 referrals were made using Choose and Book to services delivered by PCTs. The assessment service functionality in Choose and Book can be used to support referrals to community services delivered by multi-disciplinary teams where referrals are reviewed first before being directed to the appropriate service. A recent BMA article available at www.bma.org.uk/ap.nsf/Content/candbpaeds provides guidance on how this can be done for community paediatric services.

The following examples illustrate three different ways PCTs may publish their community based services on Choose and Book:

1. Using your own community patient administration system (PAS). Oldham PCT are using their iSOFT Patient Manager community PAS to publish their community based diabetes, dermatology, and ophthalmology services and their musculo-skeletal and urology Integrated Clinical Assessment and Treatment Services (ICATS).

David Boothroyd, Service Improvement Partner responsible for Choose and Book, describes how Oldham PCT took a phased approach to expansion: *"We started with a few small community based services that could be referred into through our clinical assessment services and then added more complex ICAT services that have traditionally only been delivered in secondary care. It has worked well for all the services so far and patients like it. I think the key is the control it gives patients over the process. We are now planning to expand to more traditional community based services such as podiatry. We recognise that there may be some community based services which are not currently right for Choose and Book, for example where practitioners make home visits and appointment times are not fixed."*

PCTs are encouraged to liaise with their local system providers to establish when Choose and Book compliant community PAS systems will be available.

2. Using the PAS of a local Acute provider. Barnsley PCT are using a McKesson PAS they share with Barnsley Hospital NHS Foundation Trust to publish musculo-skeletal, physiotherapy, podiatry, ENT and aural care community services.

Stuart Smith, Choose and Book Project Manager, describes some of the challenges of using Choose and Book for community based services: *"It does take time for services to redesign their processes for Choose and Book. Some had previously been using paper diaries so it was a big change moving to a PAS and having to determine ratios of new to follow-up appointments and accept or reject referrals in advance. However, staff do see the benefits of the system now and wouldn't be without it. Clearly, it makes no difference to patients whether they are being referred to a service delivered in a secondary care or community setting. Patients just really like being able to walk out of their GP practice with an appointment. Using Choose and Book for community based services also ensures there is an equity of access for these services."*

Ailsa Claire, the PCT's Chief Executive, believes using Choose and Book for community based services also has benefits in terms of service development and commissioning: *"Using Choose and Book demands a rigour in determining referral criteria, follow-up ratios, and slot availability. It also produces real time data which can be attributed to contract income which has previously been a real issue for community services."*

3. Publishing services which can be indirectly booked. Robert Hansford, Commissioning Manager for Acute Contracts and Choice, describes how Southampton PCT are publishing ophthalmology, dermatology, ENT, audiology, cardiology and rheumatology services delivered by GPSIs and Clinical Nurse Specialists, and a variety of paediatric services delivered in the community: *"We have found that our patients generally love Choose and Book. It gives them more choice and greater access to our community services. It's easy to use, with patients either making their appointment via a central call centre for our GPSI services, or by phoning directly to book their appointments with individual services."*

Do the appropriate specialty and clinic types exist for our community based services?

New specialty and clinic types are being developed for common community based services such as podiatry, physiotherapy and health promotion services. If you have community based services that are not appropriately covered by the existing specialty and clinic types in Choose and Book, please email the Choose and Book Directory of Services Content mail box at doscontent-bulletin@nhs.net