

Dr Karl Graham

Hedge End Medical Centre, Hedge End, Southampton

Dr Karl Graham, has been a partner at the Hedge End Medical Centre in Southampton since September 2002. He has used the Choose and Book system to make all his first outpatient referrals since the system was launched locally in 2005.

As the IT lead at his practice, Dr Graham is able to support the rest of his colleagues and promote the correct use of Choose and Book. Since using Choose and Book, the team have been able to identify significant benefits, particularly since the launch of Release 4.2 in June 2009 and the new functionalities available through the upgrade.

Searching through SNOMED CT®

Since Release 4.2 last year, the added functionality of SNOMED searching in the Directory of Services, has saved administrative time and made the referral process more efficient.

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SNOMED searching replaces the former key word functionality, so that services accessed through the Directory of Services are standardised by clinical terminology, making finding appropriate services and referring in this way safer and more accurate.

Within the practice they use an integrated Vision system which makes the attachment of referral information more straight forward and has made the whole referral process much more efficient. Karl uses the notes he makes in the GP clinical system following each consultation to form the referral letter for those patients he refers through Choose and Book. This has dramatically reduced the amount of administrative time in the

practice needed to type and send referral letters and has freed up the administrative team to concentrate on other work. Choose and Book definitely makes Dr Graham's day to day work more effective. Patients who need referring are done through Choose and Book so at the end of the day there is never a batch of referrals to remember to dictate and pass to the secretaries, it has all been done as part of the integrated process.

Dr Graham said: "When I refer a patient I am referring them regarding a particular clinical condition or for a specific treatment or procedure. As the referrer, I am not particularly interested in what different providers have named their services, I just need to be

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sure that the service detailed is clinically appropriate for my patient.

“By using SNOMED terms to search through Choose and Book, I can be sure that the list of services returned will be appropriate and that the patient can make their choice from the providers and locations listed. It would now seem illogical to use any other form of search mechanism.”

Improving patient choice

As a GP, Dr Graham is aware of the importance of patient choice in their healthcare. He said: “Choose and Book is an important tool that allows patients to be more involved in their care. The fact that Choose and Book allows patients to select the date, time and place that they are treated is a huge benefit for patients.

“Recently a patient came to see me regarding an unusual skin complaint. The patient was really eager to be treated as soon as possible so was considering paying for a private appointment. When I accessed the Choose and Book system I found a directly bookable service, with an appointment that was available the following week.

“The patient was thrilled that they could be seen so quickly and remarked that it would have actually taken longer to get a private appointment. This gives a perfect example of how

Choose and Book can help improve the patient care pathways. In this case the patient walked away with a booked appointment and was treated quickly.”

An important additional benefit of Choose and Book is that the referrer is able to check the information in the providers’ Directory of Services to ensure that the referral is going to the most appropriate place first time. Whereas with the old paper process a referral could take several weeks to be returned if it had been sent to an inappropriate specialty or clinician.

Dispelling the myths

As with any IT system, there are myths surrounding the use of Choose and Book and some clinicians are reluctant to migrate to the electronic booking system.

Dr Graham said: “I do find it difficult to understand why some clinicians spend time and resources coming up with manual ways of getting round an electronic system. If the Choose and Book system is used correctly it is the safest, most effective way of referring patients.

“Since using the SNOMED method of searching I’ve found the system very easy to use and can’t remember the last time I had a rejected referral from Choose and Book.”

The administrative team at Hedge End Medical Centre

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are supportive of Choose and Book, and take a proactive approach by regularly monitoring the work lists and following up any overdue referral letters.

By using Choose and Book effectively in this practice the team have saved administrative time, which has freed time up for staff to focus on other tasks.

Dr Graham said: “I’ve found that Choose and Book is the most efficient and safest way to refer patients to a first outpatient appointment, as well as being the most beneficial referral method to facilitate patient choice.”