

Improving the ability to track the progress of referrals using Choose and Book



Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust

Using Choose and Book has improved the quality of the referral process for both patients and clinicians in Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust (PCT). The Choose and Book system has improved patients' experiences by increasing their involvement in the referral process.

Choose and Book is a national service that for the first time, combines electronic booking and a choice of hospital, date and time for first outpatient appointments.

It revolutionises the old referral system by allowing patients to choose their initial hospital or clinic appointment, and book it on the spot in the surgery or later on the phone or via the internet.

The Choose and Book system has also proven beneficial for clinicians and GP practice staff across the PCT, reducing administrative time, simplifying the referral process and reducing the average time it takes for patients to have their first hospital or clinic appointment confirmed.



Sunderland Teaching PCT have made great progress by encouraging team work when implementing Choose and Book.

Using research to understand the benefits being realised by using Choose and Book

A survey was undertaken by Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust to gather evidence of the benefits being realised across the local health community as a result of using Choose and Book.

A questionnaire was sent to all GP practices in Sunderland, who are using Choose and Book. A total of 25 out of 52 GP practices using Choose and Book returned their questionnaires, representing a response rate of 48%.

Leading the way for the North East

Since early 2006, 52 out of the 54 GP practices in Sunderland have been using Choose and Book. The success in this area has meant that Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust now ranks within the top 20 PCTs nationally, and is first across the North East Strategic Health Authority for Choose and Book performance.

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Project Manager, Mia Alner

Support from GPs was vital from the start

Project Manager, Mia Alner, who also led on the delivery of training to Sunderland GP practices, knows all too well how hard each of the practices have worked since 2006 to sustain their impressive ranking.

She said: "The continued support and commitment to Choose and Book from Sunderland's GP practices is much recognised and appreciated by the project team. Establishing and maintaining working partnerships with City Hospitals Sunderland throughout the project implementation was very important and has dictated the successes attributed to Choose and Book services across the Sunderland Health community.

"The establishment of an Informatics clinical application support service and a GP practice super user network group working together with the project team has helped ensure the continued success of Choose and Book across Sunderland. This is crucial as more local provider services and specialist services, such as

'two week waits', suspicious of cancer become available in Choose and Book."

GP Practice staff using Choose and Book

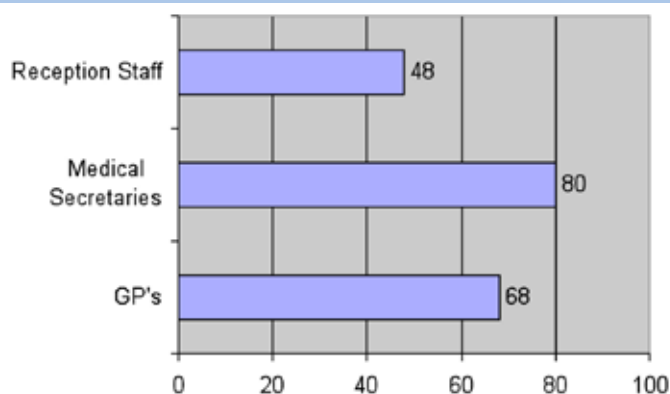
When asked what percentage of their staff currently use Choose and Book, GP practices confirmed that the majority of their users are medical secretaries (80%) followed closely by GPs (68%).

With the majority of hospital services across the North East now offered as directly bookable services in Choose and Book, 21 of the 25 GP practices (84%) that responded to the audit stated that they book appointments for their patients.

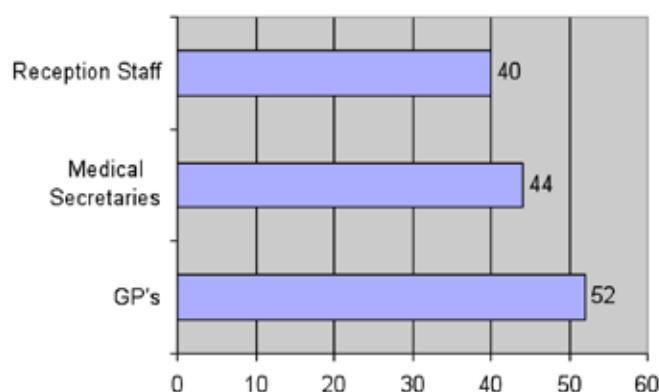
When asked which member of the practice team books the appointment for the patient, the GP practices confirmed that the majority of the appointments are booked by the GP, most likely during consultation with the patient.

Whilst there are different ways that GPs and their staff use the Choose and Book system in their GP practice, the outcome in most cases is that the patient leaves the GP practice having made their choice of hospital or clinic, with a booked appointment, that they are immediately aware of, and is at a date and time that is convenient to them.

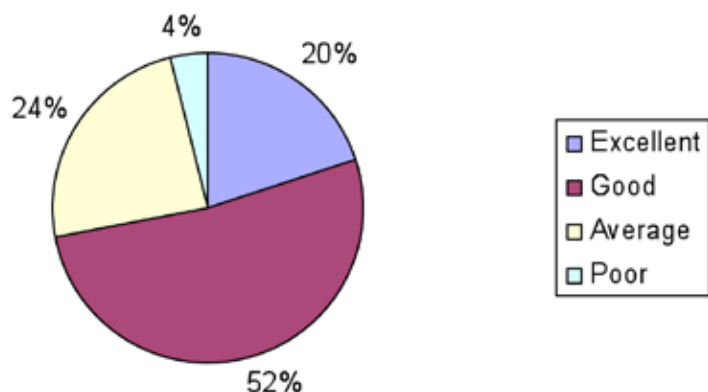
Percentage of staff using Choose and Book



Which member of the practice team books the appointment for the patient?



Experience of staff using Choose and Book



84% of the 25 GP practices who responded believe their patients know that appointments can be booked in the GP practice; with 64% believing their patients know that appointments can be booked via The Appointments Line (TAL) and just 32% believing patients know that appointments can be booked via the internet at a later date.

Support for Choose and Book

When asked to rate their experience of Choose and Book, 20% believed it to be excellent; 52% rate the system as good; 24% as average and just 4% rated their experience with Choose and Book as poor.

Additionally 72% of GP practices agreed that Choose and Book provides flexibility for practice staff when referring patients with 76% of GP practices agreeing that Choose and Book provides flexibility for patients at the point of being referred.

One GP practice explained: "If GPs are pushed for time, secretarial or admin staff can complete the appointment booking there and then or at a later time, providing a lot of flexibility in using the service."

Increasing convenience with Choose and Book

The survey results also indicated that 57% of the GP practices who responded thought that, when compared to using Choose and Book, the older paper referral process was not convenient.

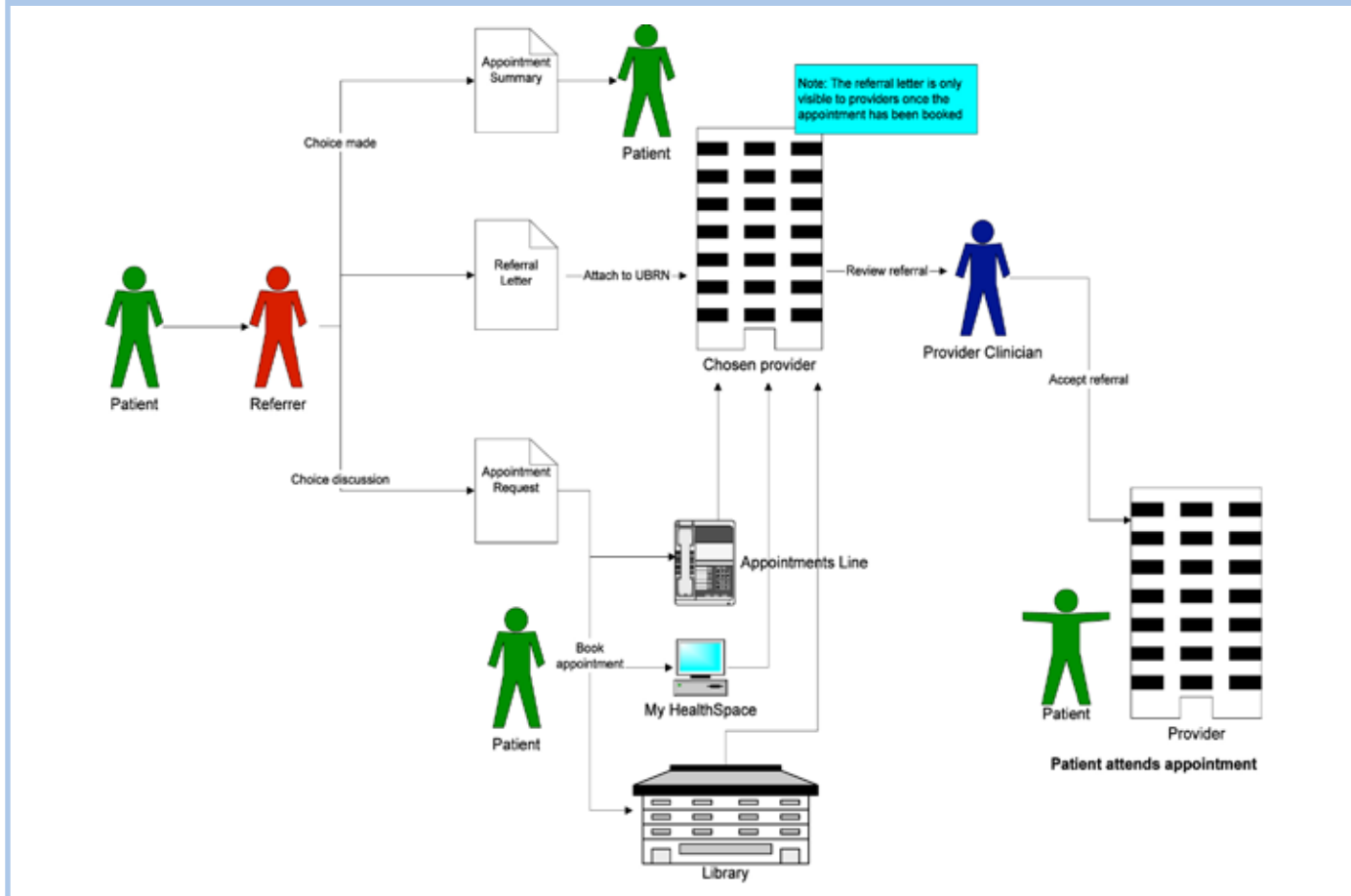
When asked to expand in more detail, the GP practices stated that they found that Choose and Book was 'quicker, more accurate and an easier way of processing referrals.' GP practices also felt that with Choose and Book there was 'less risk of referrals getting lost or misplaced.'



Using Choose and Book has increased patient choice and flexibility for patients in Sunderland.

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Appointment booking



Improving patient choice

Of the 25 GP practices who responded, 88% agreed that their patients know that they have greater choice in where they can be treated. 92% agreed that their patients know they have greater choice of an appointment date and time.

secure electronic method of referral, Choose and Book helps to avoid this time spent 'chasing' lost or misplaced referrals.

less risk of the letter getting lost and reduces printing/paper expense for the practice."

In agreement with this, one GP practice commented that "electronic referrals involve

Another GP practice confirmed, "Choose and Book is far more efficient for patients and practice staff.

Improving operational efficiency

When asked if paper referrals can get lost or misplaced, 67% of the GP practices who responded agreed that this was an issue.

GP practices thought that on average, 30 minutes of administration time a week is spent 'chasing' lost and/or misplaced paper referrals. By offering a safer more

Comments from respondents:

"Often with a paper referral the patient has to rearrange an appointment to a more convenient date and time."

"Choose and Book gives greater choice for patients, both in where they are treated and when. Choose and Book offers greater choice for patients; they choose an appointment that suits them."

"Patients have more choice and know straight away... with the paper referral process patients have no idea how long they have to wait to hear about an appointment."

"Patients have a lot more choice with Choose and Book and are involved in the process... therefore patient satisfaction is very high."

It is a safer referral process and a particular advantage is being able to track the progress of referrals and re-direct them quicker... totally paper based referrals take significantly longer.”

Choose and Book benefits

- *72% of GP practices believe that their patients have benefited since using Choose and Book*
- *52% of GP practices agreed that there have been less patient enquiries regarding their appointments.*
- *56% of GP practices agreed that less referrals are being 'lost'.*
- *72% of GP practices agreed that their patients have benefited, 63% believe administrative staff have benefited, and 50% agree that clinical staff are also benefiting.*
- *84% believe the fact that Choose and Book allows GPs and other staff access to the service specific booking guidance of each service is a real benefit. 88% agreed that services with the shortest waiting times are easily identified from within the system*
- *88% agreed that the system enables easy tracking of referrals through the process.*

Improving the Directory of Services

When asked about the Directory of Services in Choose and Book, 68% of GP practices believe the Directory of Services minimises the number of rejected referrals, and that this functionality enables patients to be referred into the right clinic, first time. 64% also believed that the fact that the Directory of Services also provides GPs with advice about the urgency of a referral and any pre-requisites for the service, is a benefit.

Some GP practices remarked that there was room for improvement in the Directory of Services for example, in the naming of some services and how these are mapped. The local Choose and Book project team continue to feed back suggestions on improving the Directory of Services and queries to hospitals, to help make the mapping and naming of services more user friendly. Both the Primary Care Trust and local GP practices understand that working in partnership with the hospitals is crucial to ensure the Directory of Services is understood and used by GPs and practice staff.

Conclusion

The results of this research gathered from GP practices across the Sunderland health community, shows the potential benefits of Choose and Book when used in place of paper referrals.

Working and co-operating closely across primary and secondary care specialist project teams on Choose and Book has proven a successful exercise in the Sunderland health community, improving take up of Choose and Book in this area so much so that Sunderland leads on Choose and Book performance in the North East of England. The involvement and proactive cooperation of these teams has accelerated use of Choose and Book, encouraging medical staff working in GP practices in various roles, to work together to increase the number of electronic referrals made through the system.

The data recovered also shows an improvement in the quality of service provided to patients. The majority of practices surveyed feel that by using Choose and Book they are able to give clearer guidance to patients on the referral process, because they can more easily track referral progress through the system.

The majority of the GP practices who participated in the survey have experienced reductions in administration time and referral waiting times, increased delivery of patient choice, and ultimately improved patient satisfaction.