



HEALTH SCRUTINY PANEL

FINAL REPORT INTO CHOOSE & BOOK

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The concept of patient choice and treating the patient as a consumer of services is currently one of the biggest policy strands in today's NHS. Whilst such a policy direction can be set, the systems and processes are required to be in place to facilitate the delivery of such a service.
2. It is often the systems and processes that patients have to negotiate their way through, that can cause the most interest and, at times, be the subject of most debate.
3. Choose and Book is exactly that, it is a systematic tool aimed at facilitating patient choice in today's NHS. Since summer 2004, Choose and Book has been introduced across England. It will eventually be available to all patients. From 1 January 2006, when patients and their GP agreed that an appointment with a specialist was required, the patient is able to choose from at least four hospitals or clinics. The patient will also be able to choose the date and time of appointment.¹ This represents a significant shift in the role of the patient, how specialist advice is accessed and the influence the patient exerts over their care.
4. It is with this in mind that the Panel wanted to consider in detail Choose and Book's implications for the NHS and particularly the impact it could have on Middlesbrough residents and their access to the services they require.

CONCLUSIONS

5. On the strength of the evidence received, the Panel concludes that the principle of Choose & Book, as a means to supporting Patient Choice, is a welcome development. It can provide greater certainty and control to patients, at what can be a distressing time.

¹ Please see www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk

6. Based on the unanimous views of witnesses, the top down process for the procurement and rollout of the Choose & Book system was unhelpful, misinformed about what was needed and actually provided IT equipment that was not 'up to the job'.
7. That through a lot of hard work by the local NHS, Choose & Book stands every chance of being successful in Middlesbrough and contributing to an improvement in the patient experience.
8. That the technical problems i.e. around connection speeds and the workability of the Directory of Services, need to be considered and remedied as a matter of urgency, as a barrier to the successful of implementation to Choose & Book.
9. That all groups in society need to be able to use their choice, if the concept of choice is to mean anything. The introduction of Choose & Book should be seen as an opportunity to combat the traditional inequalities in accessing secondary care. It is not sufficient to accept inequality as an inevitable.
10. That there seems to be a friction between the management of referrals to secondary care by the PCTs and the consultant body's role in making decisions on appropriate care pathways.

RECOMMENDATIONS

11. That the North East Strategic Health Authority, on behalf of the local NHS, strenuously lobbies the Department of Health to take steps to dramatically improve the IT equipment in use to implement Choose & Book, in consultation with NHS staff (clinical and administrative) who will be using the system. The Panel wishes to know the outcome of that dialogue.
12. That Middlesbrough PCT pursues a publicity campaign, emphasising the choice that patients now have and how it can be used, by all sectors of the community.
13. That Middlesbrough PCT and the South Tees Hospitals NHS Trust continue to work together to find a suitable referral protocol. That protocol should be consistent with the ethos of providing more services in the community, without eroding the consultant body's expertise in influencing appropriate care pathways. The Health Scrutiny Panel would like six monthly updates on how this is being delivered.