Choose and Book has been in operation since 2004 and is already an established electronic booking tool for the NHS, offering patients choice of treatment and providing commissioners with the information they need to ensure that appropriate services are available in their areas.

**What is Choose and Book?**

Choose and Book is a national service that combines electronic booking with a choice of place, date and time for first hospital or clinic appointments. It revolutionises the old booking 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.

Patients that have been referred through Choose and Book are very positive about the service.

**How does Choose and Book work?**

When a referring clinician and their patient agree that a referral to a specialist is required, the clinician is able to enter specific search criteria into Choose and Book and generate a list of appropriate services for the patient to choose from. The system can search for a suitable appointment to be booked at the time, or the patient can be given an Appointment Request Letter that includes their Unique Booking Reference Number (UBRN) and a password. This gives the patient clear instructions on how they can book their appointment later on the phone or via the internet.

**A national Directory of Services**

Choose and Book incorporates a Directory of Services showing what is available to the NHS. This allows services to be visible and available for clinicians to refer patients into and book appointments.

For each service, provider organisations can specify the conditions seen and treated, along with any exclusions. Other useful information, including age/gender of patients treated, pre-requisite investigations required and alternative services that should be considered are also readily available to the referrer.

Choose and Book enables referring clinicians to use a clinical term to search for services most appropriate to the patients needs, or to search for specific named consultant-led teams.

For patients, the Directory of Services provides a useful link to NHS Choices, where providers can be compared.

**Security**

Access to the Choose and Book system is restricted to those who have a genuine role-based requirement. NHS staff requiring access need to apply for a Smartcard and be authorised and approved before they are given access.
Clinical information is restricted to primary or secondary care clinicians and those staff working on their behalf (e.g. medical secretaries). The level of information available to them is determined by their smartcard role.

As all information is held within the system, all actions are fully auditable. Most referral and booking actions can be viewed within Choose and Book by NHS staff with appropriate access.

Choose and Book is accessed through the secure NHS N3 network.

Everyone working for, or on behalf of, the NHS is responsible for the information they access and have a legal duty to respect patient confidentiality and keep information secure under the Data Protection Act (1998). As part of their terms and conditions of employment, all NHS staff work within a Code of Conduct which governs the use of patient information.

**Benefits**

When fully implemented, Choose and Book delivers a better patient and professional experience, along with efficiency and financial benefits to referrer and provider organisations.

**For referrers** this includes, a safe, secure and reliable system, available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, which supports patients in their choice decisions, provides referrers with an easy and reliable way of identifying appropriate services and helps optimise the clinical appropriateness of referrals.

The Choose and Book concept of ‘book now-refer later’ allows the referrer, at the time of the consultation, to fully involve the patient in the decision-making process.

The ‘Advice and Guidance’ facility, along with support for Clinical Assessment Services, allows for clinical management of problems to be considered prior to (or instead of) a referral. This can potentially reduce referral costs and open up the possibility of alternative and more appropriate clinical pathways.

The correct implementation of Choose and Book allows for more efficient referral processes e.g. reduced time spent chasing written referrals.

Choose and Book, with its built-in search tools, allows the correct service/clinic to be selected. The increased visibility of available services supports more appropriate care closer to home. It also informs the referrer of new services as they become available in the area or further afield.

**For provider organisations** Choose and Book provides support for process change and service re-design, a significant reduction in Did Not Attend (DNA) and an increase in the appropriateness of referrals.

Productivity and efficiency can be improved in provider organisations by a reduction in staff time spent processing referrals, including electronic storage of referral letters and a reduction in the number of paper records transported across different sites and departments. Less time is spent by NHS staff ringing patients or sending out letters to arrange appointments.

Choose and Book allows for more cost-effective use of consultant time by allowing them to review and process referrals online (wherever they are based) and reducing inappropriate referrals by use of the Advice and Guidance facility, Clinical Assessment Services and an accurate Directory of Services.
For the patient  Choose and Book is a secure and reliable method of displaying available services from which choices can be made regarding on-going medical care. It provides patients with much more in the way of certainty and enables them to remain in control and ensure that they are involved in all decisions regarding their future health care needs (“no decision about me without me”).

Commissioning

Choose and Book can be used to support effective commissioning in the following ways:

Service planning and design

Using referral activity recorded within Choose and Book, it is possible to identify the needs of a local population and commission cost-effective services to replace or enhance existing services provided in secondary care.

By analysing the outcomes/responses from ‘Advice and Guidance’ requests or Clinical Assessment Services, it is possible to identify where new or complimentary services are required.

Using Advice and Guidance services to better manage the patient care pathway and offer appropriate service closer to home.

Contract management

Spend against contracts can be monitored by measuring referral volumes per service within Choose and Book and then attributing costs to those volumes.

Choose and Book records activity against each referral, providing (near) real-time analysis of:

- Referral volumes, down to individual provider service, referrer and patient levels.
- Projected spend, to help reduce the possibility of overspends (Traditionally this has been difficult using retrospective data).
- Prospective demand, by providing a transparent ‘forward order book’.
- Outliers in referral activity, helping to proactively manage contracts.
- Activity data, which can be used to monitor, compare and challenge provider information.

Commissioning of care pathways

Locally provided care pathways support the quality improvements of the NHS. Choose and Book allows for the setting up of services that are available to only the local health community, based on identified needs.

Referral management

By matching clinical search criteria to the services available within Choose and Book, suitable services can be identified and patients accurately referred.

By using the information within the Directory of Services, referrers can ensure that the patient is clinically prepared for their consultation.
By acting on the response to ‘Advice and Guidance’ requests, alternative management options can be considered leading to fewer and more appropriately directed referrals.

Clinical assessment of referrals and referral information helps support clinical decisions that can lead to referrals being directed into the most appropriate commissioned services.

By using information from reports and extracts within Choose and Book, referral patterns can be identified and information used to influence referral behaviour.

**Enhancing quality**

Monitoring rejected and redirected referrals can indicate areas where referral quality may be improved.

Choose and Book supports patient choice and control, by providing relevant information, leading to certainty and reassurance throughout the stages of the referral/booking process.

**Education of referrers**

Information contained within the Directory of Services in Choose and Book helps educate professional users about evolving patterns of service provision, locally and nationally.

Information within each service entry of the Directory of Services can be used to support the clinical education of referrers.

Identification of unusual referral patterns, obtained from Choose and Book extracts and reports, can be used to identify evolving trends and provide evidence for educational requirements.

More detailed information on Choose and Book can be found at [www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/staff](http://www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/staff).

Supporting documents to this guide can be found at [www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/staff/communications/fact](http://www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/staff/communications/fact).