

**1. Patient Choice and Libraries:** From the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008 the majority of patients may choose a hospital when they are referred for a first outpatient appointment. This will include any provider in the country, including some private providers. This is to alert library staff of the library's role should patients wish to choose and book a hospital appointment.

**2. Resources to Support Patients:** The Department of Health has developed two resources for use by both GP and their patients:

- a) The open access NHS Choices website, [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk), showing comparative information about providers (like cleanliness and infection rates), common conditions and health in general. Each PCT will also provide written information to patients.
- b) *Choose and Book* online booking is accessed by password and shows appointments available. There is a link to *Choose and Book* from the Choices website.

**3. The role of public libraries:** People are increasingly using the public library for information about health. The Department of Health is planning a national awareness campaign on choice during March. It is therefore likely that patients will seek support from the library to choose a provider of treatment and/or book an appointment online.

To provide information and meet local needs, especially among socially excluded groups, libraries will wish to be prepared to help. A 6 month pilot tested this in 10 authorities, 3 rural and 10 London boroughs. Numbers were very low so it is difficult to reach firm conclusions. However, patients were pleased and library staff felt the role fitted in with their existing functions.

**4. How Choice and Library Support works:** For the patient there are different approaches. Options which might involve the library are:

**Step 1** The GP suggests the patient needs referral to hospital and discusses options. Their GP will give the patient an Appointment Request with a list of providers suitable for the patient, a password and a Unique Booking Reference Number

**Step 2** Patients who want more information first, or have already chosen a provider but want to book, may seek information and help from the library.

**Step 3** The Patient goes to the library and may use the People's Network to research information on the NHS Choices website about the hospitals offered on their Appointment Request. They may ask for staff help. This does not require password access. They may ask for selected pages to be printed so they can consider their choices further at home.

**Step 4** Having chosen their preferred hospital, the patient may use the library (immediately or on a return visit) to book online, with help from staff if necessary. They will need their password and Unique Booking Reference Number. Alternatively, they may book on the phone from home or may ask the library staff to do so.

### 5. Issues for library staff

a) **Maintaining Patient Confidentiality:** When viewing the Choose and Book screen after password access, you will not see the patient's medical records but details such as the type of clinic being booked will be visible. They may also disclose sensitive information to staff themselves. As well as Data Protection requirements, staff have a duty of confidence to the patient in respect of any information relating to their health and treatment.

- The patient must be informed in advance of what will be disclosed on the screen
- Library staff must obtain their consent to that disclosure.
- Library staff must protect the information from further disclosure

For more information, please see

[www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/InformationPolicy/PatientConfidentiality](http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/InformationPolicy/PatientConfidentiality)

**b) Responding to patients' queries:** some queries may be raised which cannot be answered on the NHS Choices or Choose and Book sites. It is important that these are routed appropriately:

- Questions about the *meaning of some of the information* on the Choices website should be referred to your local PCT Patient Advice and Liaison Officer. Contact information on the NHS Choices website
- Questions about the *type of services or facilities offered* by a particular provider should be referred to the provider concerned
- Questions about the *type of treatment* patients are having (e.g. the pros and cons) surgery) should be referred to GP if they are beyond the scope of Choices website.
- Questions about *a patient's own treatment* must be referred back to the GP practice.

**6. Issues for local decision-making:** Three issues came up in the pilots which we feel are best left to local decision-making:

- a) Cost of printing:** where patients want information printed out. It is for authorities to decide whether to charge, offer free printing or put a limit on the number of free pages.
- b) Dedicated PC:** in the pilots, some authorities decided to dedicate a PC for this use. This was unnecessary as numbers were low and is not recommended.
- c) Telephone Booking:** some pilots undertook telephone booking for patients either because the chosen provider was not yet on the Choose and Book system or because the system was down at the time.

**7. Training:** Brief training, developed from the materials used in the pilots and evaluated by participants, will be made available to staff. The development of an online resource is being explored currently.

**8. Libraries as Agents for Choice:** Libraries have the capacity to make informed choice accessible to their communities, especially for people who are not IT literate. In Waltham Forest, for example, a profoundly deaf patient with no IT skills came into the library for help. Staff helped him by using the computer alongside him, giving the options and making the booking for him. With their help, someone excluded from this convenience was able to benefit from it just like anyone else. This role goes to the heart of the library function as provider information and support to their communities.