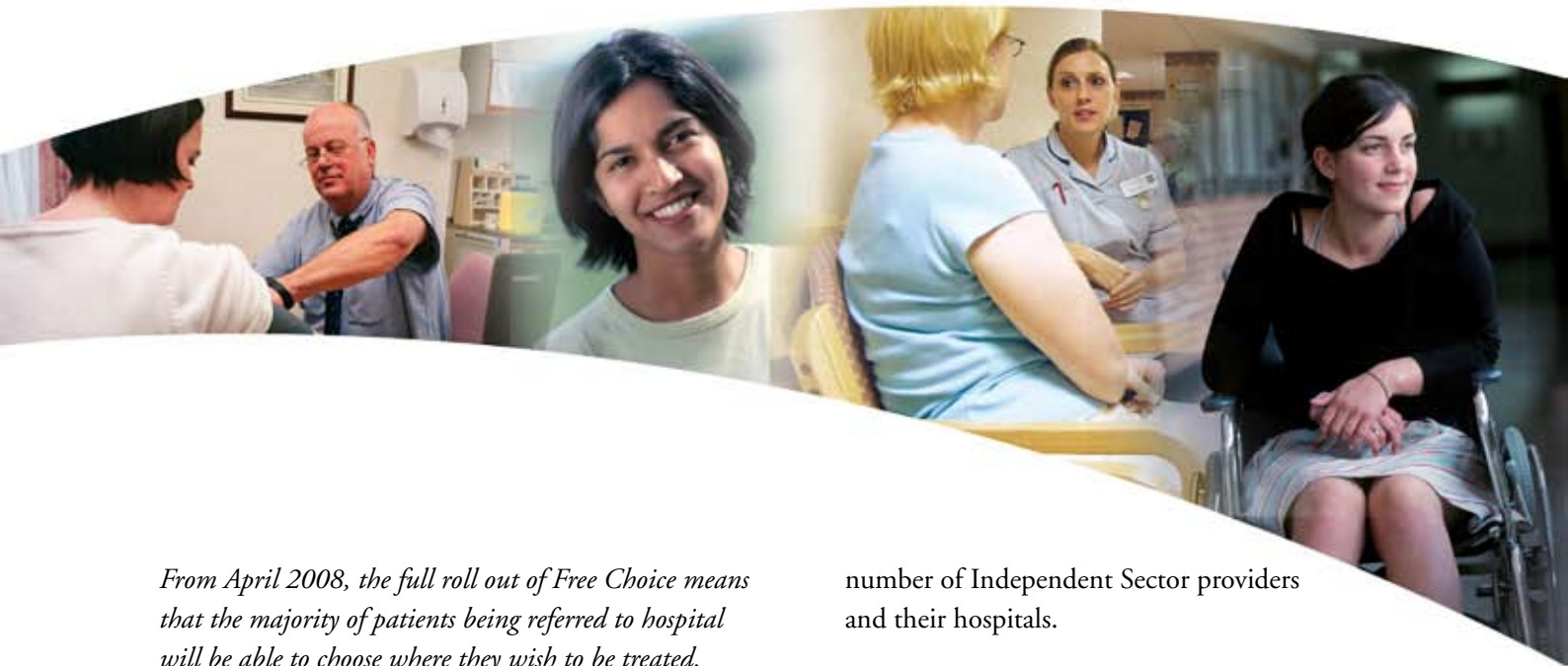


# Introduction of Free Choice at Referral

## Important changes affecting Providers



*From April 2008, the full roll out of Free Choice means that the majority of patients being referred to hospital will be able to choose where they wish to be treated.*

*In a Free Choice environment, there will no longer be any local commissioning of elective care hospital-based services and on this basis, provider income from elective care will be dependent on the providers' ability to attract patients.*

*The Choose and Book application and the NHS Choices website ([www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)) will change to support this changing policy.*

number of Independent Sector providers and their hospitals.

All providers will be on the Choose and Book System and will be able to offer directly bookable services. (unless explicit exemption from having a compliant patient administration system has been granted for valid technical or commercial reasons).

GPs will be able to refer to any clinically appropriate provider and PCT commissioning arrangements will not restrict where patients are offered a choice.

### 1. What does this mean for patients?

Patients referred for elective care will be able to choose to attend any secondary care provider across the country.

### 2. What does this mean for providers?

The range of eligible providers will include all NHS Foundation Trusts, NHS Acute Trusts and a large

### 3. Does this apply to all services?

There may be clinical reasons for limiting the range of choices that are available to patients and there are some services that fall outside the scope of the choice policy. Where speed of access is particularly important (for example, patients attending a rapid access chest pain clinic under the 2 week maximum waiting time or patients attending cancer services under the 2 week maximum waiting time), the policy does not apply.

Maternity and mental health services are also currently exempt.

#### **4. Can patients still be referred into Primary Care based services?**

Yes, where local services have been set up, for example under Practice Based Commissioning, these will still be available to patients at the point of referral using Choose and Book. Primary Care based services will not normally be available nationally.

#### **5. Can patients still be referred to their local hospital?**

Yes, patients may still choose to go to their local hospital.

#### **6. Where can a list of secondary care providers be found?**

The easiest way for referrers to find a list of secondary care providers will be to use Choose and Book, which is being changed to allow all providers to be shown in one place, through the national Directory of Services.

Providers are responsible for loading their services onto the Directory of Services and should include the information that referrers need to make appropriate referrals. As services will be visible to all referrers nationally, providers may need to revisit their Directory of Service entries. Guidance is available at [www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/staff/dos](http://www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/staff/dos)

#### **7. How will the appearance of Choose and Book Change?**

The Choose and Book application will be updated to list all secondary care services from across the country that meet the search criteria, alongside all primary care services which are commissioned by the PCT. This change will happen automatically by assigning primary care services to the primary care menu and secondary care services to the secondary care menu.

By default, services will be displayed in distance order from the patient's postcode. It is however possible for referrers to change this display order and sort by indicative waiting times. It is also possible to change

the postcode in order to look at services in another area if this is what the patient wants or needs.

Further information on changes to Choose & Book is available online at [www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk](http://www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk)

#### **8. When will these changes take effect?**

These changes will take effect from April 2008.

#### **9. How will patients find information about providers?**

Provider information will be available to patients to help inform their decision about where they want to be referred.

- Patients can call the Appointments Line to obtain information by calling 0845 608 8888
- Patients can visit the NHS Choices website at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)
- Patient can visit the Choose and Book patient website at [www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk](http://www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk)

Details of a Provider's services (as contained on Choose & Book) will appear on the NHS Choices website ([www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)) and will be used in making reliable comparative information available to patients. The position of a provider's services on the NHS Choices scorecards will be based solely on their distance from the patient.

These NHS Choices ([www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)) hospital profiles offer a valuable free method of promotion and providers may also want to consider other ways of making patients aware of the services available, in line with the Code of Practice for Promotion of NHS Services.

#### **10. What about transport for patients who choose to be treated outside their local area?**

Eligible patients will continue to be provided with transport to the hospital of their choice. Arrangements for booking transport will be determined locally as they are now.