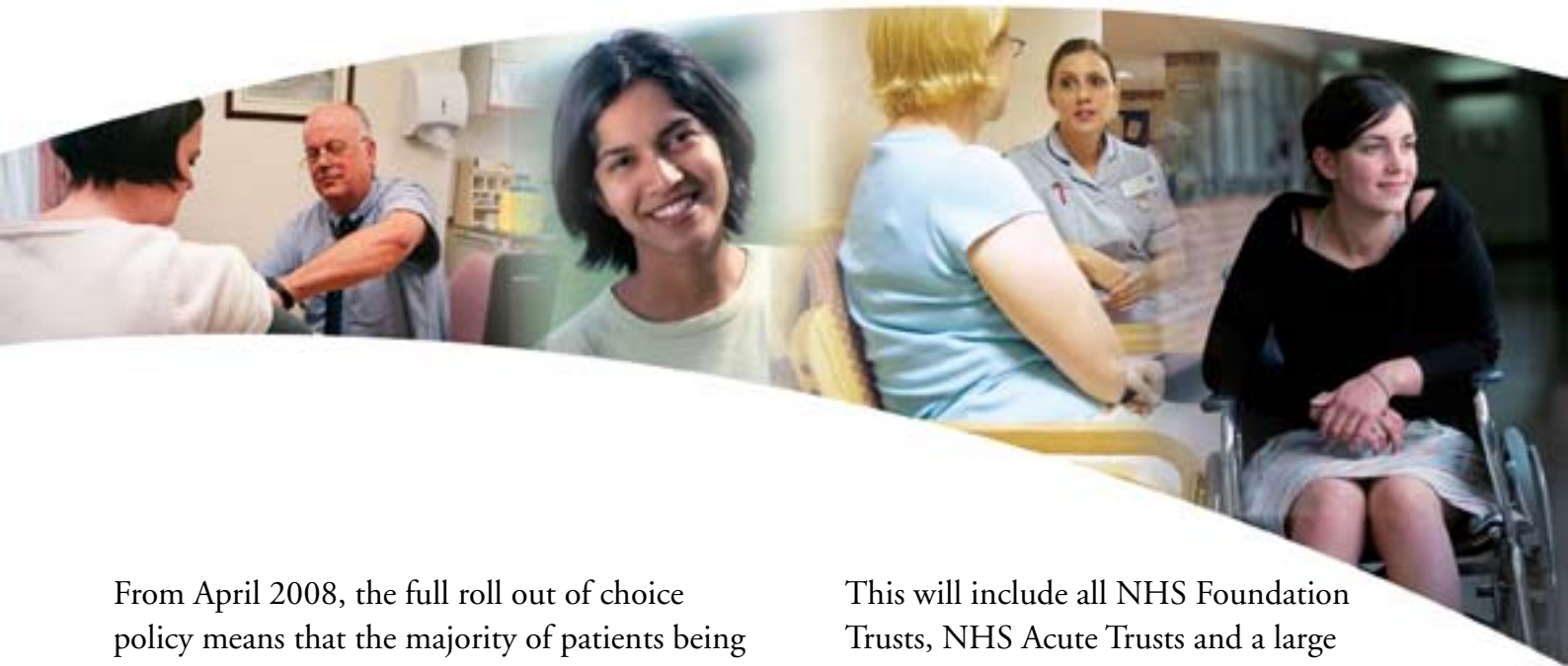


Introduction of Free Choice at Referral

Important changes affecting Choose and Book



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

The Choose and Book application will change to support this changing policy.

1. What does this mean for patients?

Patients will be able to choose any secondary care provider across the country.

2. What does this mean for referrers?

Providers that have a contract with the NHS will be on the Choose and Book system.

This will include all NHS Foundation Trusts, NHS Acute Trusts and a large number of Independent Sector providers and their hospitals.

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

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 to find a list of secondary care providers will be by using Choose and Book, which is being changed to allow all providers to be shown in one place, through a national Directory of Services.

7. How will the appearance of Choose and Book change?

The current 'Suggest Services' button will be replaced by two buttons: 'Search Primary Care' and 'Search All'.

Selecting the 'Search Primary Care' button will list all services commissioned by the PCT, including General Practitioners with a Special Interest (GPSI) and Clinical Assessment Services (CAS).

Selecting the 'Search All' button will list all secondary care services from across the country, alongside all services commissioned by the PCT that meet the search criteria.

By default, services will be displayed in distance order from the patient's postcode (but it will be possible to change this order, for example by changing the postcode or by sorting by indicative waiting times).

8. When will these changes take effect?

These changes will take effect from April 2008.

9. How will patients find information?

General Practitioners and practice staff will be able to provide patients with information to inform their decision on where they want to be referred. In addition:

- The patient can call the Appointments Line to obtain information by calling **0845 608 8888**
- The patient can visit the NHS Choices website at www.nhs.uk
- The patient can visit the Choose and Book patient website at www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk

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.