

## Devon LMC Position: Choose and Book – December 2007

Originally produced in June 2005, *LMC revised comments – Nov 07, plus comments following meeting with C&B leads and providers – Dec 07*

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### Background

- Devon Local Medical Committee supports the rights of patients to be referred to any NHS funded hospital or clinician. ***This means that when a named clinician is requested that it should be available as a choice on the C&B system and not as an aspiration by putting the request in the body of the letter.***
- The choice should not be limited to a specific number of choices. ***As of November 2007 choice is still severely limited and should be extended.***
- Devon Local Medical Committee deplores the political imperative to start "Choose & Book" (C&B) before an adequate IT solution is fully tested and demonstrated satisfactorily. ***The Devon Local Medical Committee still believes the system is not reliable with too many, often lengthy periods, where it is not available to be used.***
- Devon Local Medical Committee believes, that within Devon, "Choose and Book" offers patients very little choice in practice and patients would generally prefer to be seen promptly at their local District General Hospital. ***This is still very much the case and where there has been extended local choice, such as using the private hospital, the choice is often an illusion. The Local Medical Committee deplores the actions of Mount Stuart Hospital in Torquay in taking out adverts in the local paper, offering NHS care, where only a handful of appointments were actually available. The actions created false patient expectations that general practitioners had to rectify.***
- All GPs should have the right to decline to take part in "Choose & Book".
- Non participation in "Choose and Book" must not disqualify GPs from participating in Practice Based Commissioning.
- Devon Local Medical Committee is greatly concerned about patient confidentiality with the whole of the NHS IT programme (NHS Connecting for Health) and "Choose and Book" is part of that concern. ***This concern is still justified and the BMA in its July 2007 ARM, passed two motions detailing those concerns.***
- Devon Local Medical Committee states that transport booking is not part of GP services.

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### The Booking Process

- "Choose and Book" must not interfere with or prolong a consultation more than that would be expected by the current referral process. ***Where it is a simple problem and C&B is working then this may be the case but the vast majority will prolong a consultation. The time taken to make a referral has not been reduced with user experience.***
- "Choose and Book" must not transfer the administrative process of referral onto GP practice staff. ***This clearly has happened for many practices, who in order to cope with the system, direct patients to a named staff member to make the booking.***
- All agreed additional work must be resourced with new money and funded recurrently. ***Funding has not been consistent across Devon and does not fully fund the additional work.***
- Training must be included and fully funded for those involved, to any degree, with C&B. ***We have been assured that the PCOs have training available throughout the county; this can be accessed in 'real time' on actual cases. Please contact your C&B lead/and/or hospital provider to arrange.***
- Patients, with their GPs, should be able to select which clinician they wish to consult. ***This is very patchy across Devon and should be a priority of the C&B team.***
- ***Devon Local Medical Committee is concerned about the apparent behaviour of providers who switch on and off clinics to achieve their targets. PCOs assured us that this should not be happening and will be investigated by all providers. Any instances-please contact C&B lead/and/or hospital provider.***
- GPs should only be required to make a few key strokes in order to produce a referral number and patient password. ***The way some of the choices are set up appear illogical and can be confusing which increases the time taken for a referral.***

- The referral letter should allow for personal variation and be transmitted to the "Booking Management Service" at a later date. ***It should be acknowledged that general practitioners are under great pressure to produce a referral letter in a very short space of time. The Local Medical Committee notes that Local Trusts appear not to be under the same pressure to produce outpatient or discharge letters which often arrive months later. However the Cardiac department at RD & E set a positive example of how outpatient and discharge letters are dictated during consultation and are available for collection or to be forwarded to the practice the same day.***

### **Working for a solution with the PCTs**

- Devon LMC acknowledges the political pressure PCTs are under and will seek to work with them to deliver a practical solution that will suit all parties.
- The latest PCTs targets for referrals received via C & B are

<b>Month</b>	<b>Torbay</b>	<b>Devon</b>	<b>Plymouth</b>
<b>Dec 07</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>74%</b>
<b>Jan 08</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>80%</b>
<b>Feb 08</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>85%</b>
<b>Mar 08</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>90%</b>

***There is concern that the referral figures recorded by the PCT do not correlate with the practice figures.***

- Registration for smartcards does not automatically mean acceptance and involvement of the full "Choose and Book" process.
- Devon LMC supports the setting up of a "Referral/Booking Management Service" where patients will be directed to book their appointment. ***Devon Local Medical Committee is increasingly concerned with the inconsistency of Clinical Assessment Services (CAS). Assured that this will be addressed.***
- The "Referral/Booking Management Service" should deal with all queries regarding hospitals & clinicians and be able to book appointments.
- Patients should be able to "chase up" their appointment without being referred back to their GP. ***Patients often find using the system frustrating and will return to their GP to sort the problem out. Recommendation that locally produced leaflets are updated with helpdesk numbers, which areas they support and where they are based.***
- Patient transport is an essential element to "Choose and Book" and should be included in the "Referral/Booking Management Service".
- It is essential that all setup, ongoing administrative and training costs be fully funded if "Choose and Book" is to be successful. ***It should be noted that many practices are experiencing C&B fatigue because the promised outcome has not lived up to expectation.***

### **Summary**

- ***C&B as originally envisaged, where a patient can walk out of a general practitioners surgery following a 10 minute consultation with a hospital appointment is a laudable aim. This reduces patient anxiety and allows the GP to have an accurate idea of waiting times.***
- ***Two years later, that aim is far from fulfilled in part due to the reliability and slowness of the system.***
- ***PCTs must acknowledge that general practitioners have committed time and unfunded resources in making the system work to assist PCOs in achieving their targets.***
- ***Devon Local Medical Committee demands that C&B allows patients to have a real choice and be referred to a named clinician, in a directly bookable clinic that will be available from one week to the next.***
- ***The LMC understands that the DES for C&B is still in a discussion stage nationally.***

***Dr Charlie Daniels  
Chairman Devon LMC  
November 2007***