

NHS East Sussex Downs and Weald/NHS Hastings & Rother

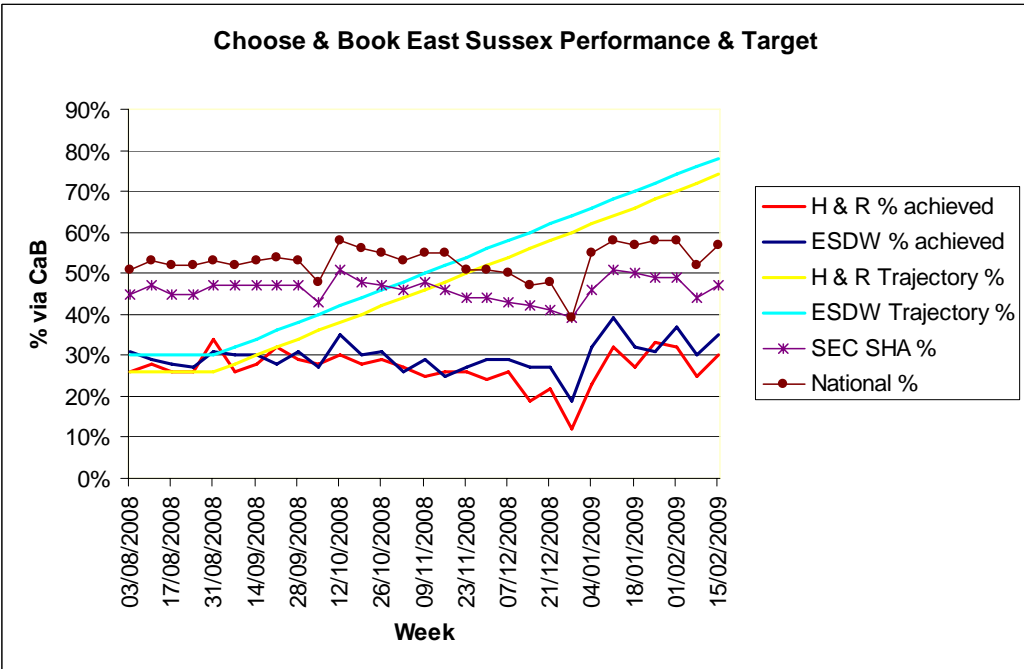
Progress Report on the Usage of the Choose and Book for First Outpatient appointments by East Sussex GP Practices

1. Purpose

This report provides a brief update for the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on current issues affecting the uptake of the Choose and Book service in East Sussex, and the measures being undertaken to improve user experience and system use.

2. Current Performance and Trends

The attached graph shows the local health economy performance together with that of the Strategic Health Authority (SHA) area and national overall trends



There was improvement in performance at the start of the year, although concern that this may be dropping once again. The improvement coincided with the commencement of a 'guaranteed' availability initiative in Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) at East Sussex Hospitals NHS Trust, the

main acute service provider described. This initiative is described in more detail below.

The usage trends in both East Sussex PCTs closely mirror the trends observed both at SHA and national level, suggesting similar influences on all. Possible reasons for this 'same but lower' pattern are being investigated.

3. Issues Affecting Performance

3.1. Technical

The PCT team responsible for supporting GPs in the use of the system continue to offer training and support directly to practices and are able to identify immediate local problems with the electronic booking system to report to the Sussex Health Information Service that provides IT support to the PCTs. Response times for technical support have improved, but interface issues remain a problem – e.g. where two interdependent parts of the system from different suppliers are not interacting correctly.

The national system spine has been unavailable on several occasions since the start of the year preventing any bookings being completed. This is beyond local control but is a disincentive for practices seeking to use the system as time is wasted attempting to use the system and there is no notification process to warn practices that it is not working or that it has been reinstated (the PCTs have instituted a local alert process) .

The local system has produced a new problem with the main hospital patient administration systems (PAS) reporting a fault which also prevents bookings being made, and has yet to be fully resolved. This has intermittently prevented bookings on several occasions since the start of the year. The cumulative effect of both these problems means that as many as 12 working days have been without a functional system.

3.1. Operational

Interpretation of the Choose and Book procedural guidance is variable and has resulted in a particular system of work at the main local acute provider that is inadvertently causing problems to patients and referrers. The problem is complex and relates to referrals received through the national booking line.

The PCTs have established links with another NHS acute trust using the same PAS system, within the SHA area, which have developed a process which mitigates the problems being experienced by the East Sussex Hospitals NHS Trust in the expectation that the solution can be applied locally.

4. Capacity

The categorisation of clinic types prevents all slots being made available to the Choose and Book system. The PCTs are working with their acute providers to rectify this by bringing ad-hoc clinics into the mainstream.

Capacity which is not currently available to the system is being brought on line. This includes independent providers (Esperance, BUPA etc) as well as community Practice Based Commissioning schemes such as Eastbourne Orthopaedic Assessment Service which sees around 2,000 patients a year.

5. Engagement

Overall referrer satisfaction with the system is improving, but is fragile, and easily damaged by any poor experience. The PCTs are endeavouring to secure engagement by removing obstacles and disincentives to system use, and at the same time providing a financial incentive scheme backed by dedicated support.

The PCTs have run an incentive scheme during 2008/9 which rewards GP practices for every appropriate referral made. In addition, the PCTs have offered of short term financial support to introduce 'back office' functions within practices. This support will continue to be available in 2009/10.

The PCTs and East Sussex Hospitals have agreed a programme to improve user experience by concentrating on specific clinical specialities where assurances can be made on slot availability. This has been piloted with ENT on the Eastbourne DGH site, and is being rolled out to the Conquest Hospital. General Surgery will be the next speciality to be subject to this initiative and will be instituted across both sites simultaneously.

Ongoing training, encouragement and support from the Choose and Book team is constantly available to practices on request, comparative user data is now being provided to all practices and is featured in performance reports to the PCT Senior Management Team and the Professional Executive Committees.

The number of practices using Choose and Book has increased.

6. Public Awareness

The PCTs have secured funding to run a public awareness campaign which will begin in April 2009. The purpose will be to raise awareness of both the right to choose a provider, and the means to do so using the Choose and Book system.

7. Summary

Performance remains a concern, but there is some confidence that the range of measures being undertaken will lead to a further improvement.