

# Patient Choice

Your Right To Choose

April 2025



## Introduction

Healthwatch Bolton is the independent voice of the public in Bolton for health and social care services. We listen to the experiences of our community when using health and social care services. We then share that feedback with commissioners and providers of services to help improve service and experiences, where necessary.

in many cases, patients have the legal right to choose where they receive their NHS treatment. The NHS is increasingly offering patients more options to tailor their care to better suit individual circumstances, putting greater control in their hands and, ideally, leading to better outcomes.

The NHS Choice Framework<sup>1</sup> provides a comprehensive guide to the choices available to patients, detailing when patients can choose their provider and when options may be limited (for instance, in emergency situations or for armed forces members

In partnership with Greater Manchester Integrated Care Partnership, we explored patients' experiences of being offered a choice of provider when referred for specialist care by their GP.

This survey ran from December 2024 to March 2025. 65 People responded.

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<sup>1</sup> [NHS Choice Framework](#)

## Findings:

**If your GP has referred you to have specialist care, were you offered a choice of where you could receive this care?**

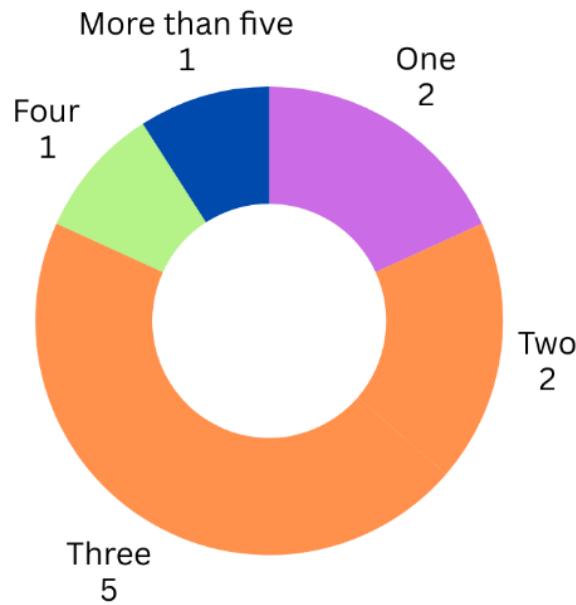


## Comments:

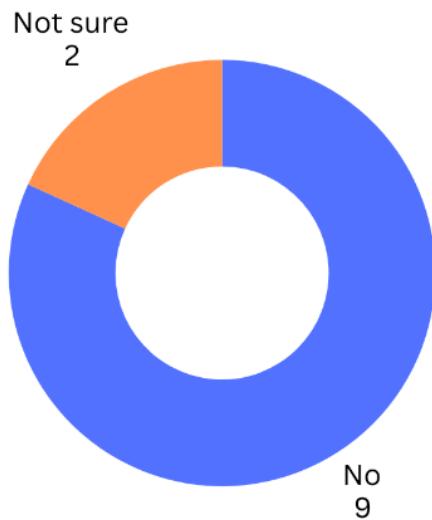
- I would like to have been made more aware that there was a choice.
- info to make the choice: closer to home for people with mobility issues and costs of treatment and travel should be considered when helping people decide between providers for specialist care.
- not needed to have this discussion
- roll out leaflets and tv adverts should be considered to help people decide between providers for specialist care.
- Proximity would have helped me to make the choice.
- After months of being poorly with reoccurring tonsilitis I am still waiting for an appointment I have been told in a year I would need to have experienced 7 episodes I have had 5 this is causing me great problems having time off work, supporting my pregnant wife and young children
- I asked could I go to another hospital and was told no but could help me to arrange a private consultation.
- Just told I would hear from Royal Bolton
- I asked for elsewhere wasn't given the option.
- Referred to Rheumatology never given an option and have waited nearly 12 months for an initial appointment.
- Just given appointment.
- Didn't offer any alternatives.

- Ultrasound scan, choice of sites but only one private provider. I requested the hospital and told I couldn't have that because of the contract.
- Told to wait.
- Did not require specialist care.
- Mammography/ ultrasound at BFT (2 week wait)
- Just got referred and still not heard back from referral which was made back in June 2024
- Not had specialist care via my GP
- I actually requested to be sent to another place with a shorter waiting time and was told that this wasn't possible. Even though on their website they said they took NHS right to choose patients, and it wasn't emergency and was completely within the terms of right to choose.
- Referred to Salford neurology Jan 23 no choice offered despite being told of 12 months wait list.
- I was referred to gynaecology a year ago and was only offered Bolton Hospital
- I was informed that I was going to be referred and wait for a letter.

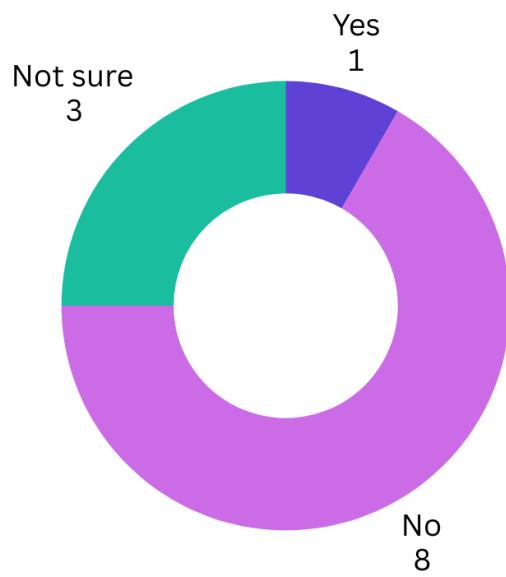
### How many choices were you offered?



**Did your GP discuss with you – the waiting times at different providers which they could choose from to offer you?**



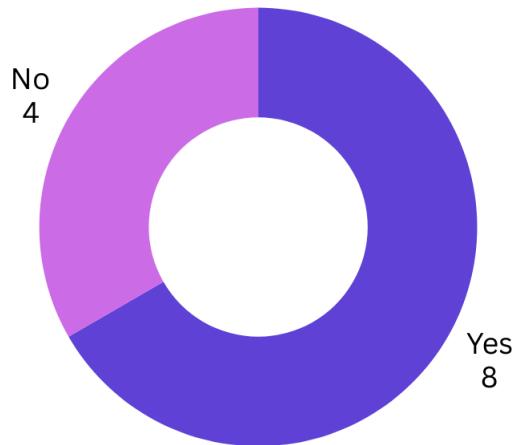
**Was an NHS funded private provider offered to you as an option?**



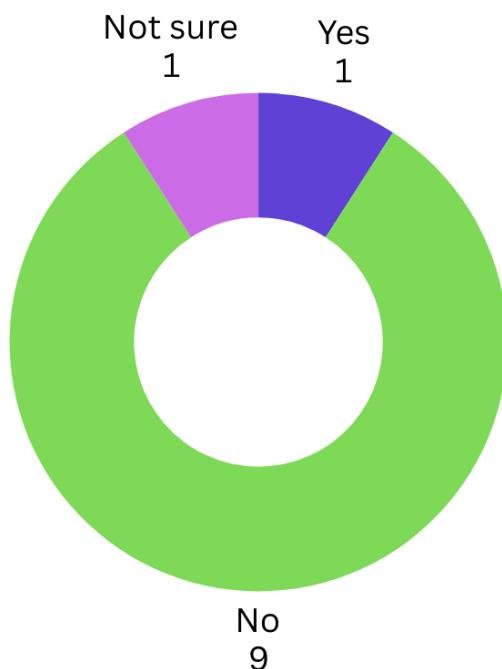
**Comment:**

- My recent hip replacement was an NHS procedure carried out at the Beaumont Hospital

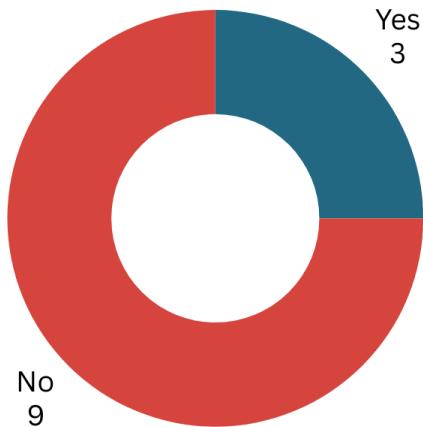
**If given a choice of providers, were you given time to think about where you might go?**



**Were you given information to compare treatment between different providers and consultants?**



**Did your GP discuss providers closest to your home taking into account travel and transport?**



**Patients also have the right to choose a clinical team led by a consultant or named healthcare professional, as long as that team provides the treatment you require. If you were already aware of a named clinician when choice was discussed, did you raise this with your GP and was this option discussed?**



## If choice was offered, what factors did you consider when choosing between providers?

- Closest to home
- I wasn't offered a choice in the surgery. They said they'd send me a letter. When the letter arrived, it asked me to log on to a portal and select the provider I wanted. There was a choice of three - two in Wigan and one in Bolton. They all had the approximate waiting time underneath, one of which said, '3 days', so I picked that one. The portal just came back with 'we have no appointments', so I tried the other two options - no appointments. Then the portal said that I'd get a letter through the post. Six months later a letter arrived giving me an appointment, but I had no say in this. There was no number to ring either and even though I attempted to ring both hospitals myself, neither of them knew anything about me as they are not joined up.
- Clinical excellence
- Nearest to home was Beaumont for knee replacement.
- The choice offered to me was really positive for me so there was no need to discuss a second option.
- Was given various hospitals to choose from. Started with the closest no availability at any of the hospitals to book an appointment.
- Waiting period
- Patient's Care Needs
- Available Choice

## What information would have helped to make the choice?

- GP always gives me choice.
- Accurate waiting times and information on the portal saying whether you'd actually be given an appointment there and then, or stuck on a waiting list. Plus, a number to ring for queries - I never actually knew whether my information had been logged.
- Informed consent
- Shortest waiting list
- Availability of Suitable Health Care/Support
- Suitability of patients care needs.

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## What else should be considered when asked to choose between providers?

- Waiting times
- The patient's ability to use the internet and understand what each choice means.

- Travel, patient preference.
- Accessibility
- Suitability to Patients,
- Care/Support Needs
- Availability of Suitable Health Care/Support

### **Any other comments?**

- Too long of a waiting list
- This was a really useless system - the portal only gave three options and none of them had any appointments. The information was very limited. I would have also liked the ability to choose somewhere further away, e.g. near my family if I needed to go to their house after an appointment rather than back home.
- Cannot get an appointment even though it has been expedited.
- Patient chose to attend,
- Out of Area (Outpatient)
- Hospital Appointment.

### **Methodology**

In partnership with Greater Manchester Integrated Care Partnership, a set of survey questions were agreed. The survey was shared both digitally and on paper. The survey was promoted at many community engagement events and feedback received from these and uploaded onto the digital survey. The survey ran from December 2024 to March 2025. 65 People responded.

### **Summary of Findings**

From the feedback only 23 people said they had been offered a choice of secondary health care providers.

Many patients felt unaware they had a choice of provider for specialist care and emphasised the need for better communication, especially regarding proximity, travel costs, and wait times. Several reported long delays limited, or no options offered, and being denied access to alternative providers despite eligibility under the NHS right to choose. Suggestions included public awareness campaigns through leaflets and TV adverts.

When choice was offered, key factors considered included proximity to home, waiting times, clinical excellence, and care needs. However, several patients faced issues with booking systems—such as unavailable appointments despite being listed—and lack of

follow-up or communication. While some found the choice process positive, others experienced confusion and delays due to uncoordinated systems and limited availability.

Patients highlighted the need for accurate, transparent information—especially about real-time appointment availability, waiting times, and care suitability. Support for those less familiar with using online systems was also emphasised. Important factors for choosing providers included travel, accessibility, individual care needs, and the option to choose based on personal circumstances. Many found the current portal system frustrating, limited, and lacking in flexibility or helpful contact options.

## Recommendations

### 1. Improve Communication and Transparency

- Clearly inform patients that they have the right to choose between providers.
- Ensure GPs consistently discuss available options during referrals.
- Provide clear explanations of what each option involves, including travel, waiting times, and care quality.

### 2. Enhance the Appointment Portal Functionality

- Display **real-time appointment availability** to avoid frustration with unavailable options.
- Show accurate, regularly updated **waiting times** for each provider.
- Add a **helpline or contact number** for patients needing assistance or clarification.

### 3. Expand Access and Support for Patient Choice

- Ensure **all eligible patients** are offered the right to choose, regardless of care type or location.
- Allow choices beyond local providers—for example, closer to family for post-treatment support.
- Provide **accessible alternatives** for those who cannot easily use digital platforms.

#### **4. Raise Awareness of the Right to Choose**

- Launch **public information campaigns** (leaflets, online content etc.) to educate patients about their rights and how to exercise them.
- Encourage GPs and healthcare staff to actively offer and explain options.

#### **5. Prioritise Individual Needs**

- Consider each patient's **care requirements**, mobility, internet access, and travel constraints when offering choices.
- Ensure services are inclusive and responsive to **personal circumstances** like caregiving responsibilities or employment.

## Responses to Report Recommendations

The report was presented at the Greater Manchester Integrated Care Partnership (ICP), Planned Care meeting in Bolton in November 2025. It was accepted there is a need for clearer information for patients on patient choice. It is not consistently offered in primary care.

- Beaumont Hospital have offered to work collaboratively on a local awareness campaign and the findings in the report will be shared in key forums.
- Existing guidance will be refreshed and recirculated.
- Greater Manchester ICP will share recommendations with the Greater Manchester elective team and will update and circulate patient choice electronic referral service (e-RS) guidance.
- Healthwatch Bolton will present to GP practice managers.

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