

MONDAY, 16 JANUARY 2006

Patients can choose private operations

PATIENTS in Warrington can now choose to have their operations in private hospitals in one of the biggest shake-ups of NHS services.

Everyone who is referred for planned and non-emergency care by their GP now has the right to choose from at least four different hospitals.

The choice will also include private providers and patients will be able to pick the time and date of their appointment.

NHS Choice works alongside a new funding system, called Payment by Results, which means hospitals are paid for each patient they treat.

Tim Deeprise, Warrington Primary Care Trust's director of commissioning and development, said: "This initiative ensures that patients are more involved in deciding where they go for treatment. We know from talking to people that this is important to them."

Dr Rajkumar, a GP at The Eric Moore Partnership Surgery in Warrington town centre, said: "The current choice initiative being introduced within the NHS offers ownership of the referral process to the patients.

"It also allows GP practices and hospital trusts to harness several exciting modernisation initiatives that are firmly aimed at transforming existing care pathways for patients."

Over the next few weeks, patients will receive information booklets with details of the different providers as well as information to make comparisons between the different providers.

The booklets include information on waiting times, MRSA rates and cancelled operations.

Chris Hannah, chief executive of Cheshire and Merseyside Strategic Health Authority, said: "National research indicates that patients are enthusiastic about having greater control over decisions about their healthcare and are prepared to exercise choice.

"Patients will vote with their feet, choosing those providers that best meet their needs."

Some doctors' practices are already using the new Choose and Book computer system, but all surgeries are upgrading their computer systems to use it. Patients do not need to wait for the software to be installed to choose a hospital.

sharker@guardiangrp.co.uk