

2-FOR-1
London
rail deal



WIN a family
day out at
**Kensington
Palace** PAGE 22



Eight-page
guide full
of **holiday
offers** **PULL-OUT**

Catalogue of complaints from patients

HOSPITAL BOOKING SYSTEM A 'FAILURE'

By **SARAH BREALEY**
Health correspondent

A system meant to transform the way hospital appointments are made is failing local patients, the EDP can reveal.

The government's much-vaunted Choose and Book system is supposed to allow patients who have been referred for hospital treatment to make an appointment at the hospital of their choice at a time and date that suits them.

But there has been a catalogue of complaints about the system, including patients being unable to get through and the wrong information being held on the national system. The problems have affected people using all three of Norfolk's hospitals – in Norwich, King's Lynn and Gorleston – including both NHS Norfolk and NHS Yarmouth and Waveney patients.

Both the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital and NHS Norfolk agree the system is causing problems and have contacted the East of England Strategic Health Authority and Connecting for Health, which runs Choose and Book, with their concerns. The problems centre round the national appointments line, based in Milton Keynes, which is run by NHS Direct.

N&N spokesman Andrew Stronach said: "We have got many concerns about the telephone appointments line that is run centrally. Feedback from GPs and patients is that they have had lots of

■ **TURN TO PAGE 12**

Picture: DENISE BRADLEY



JOURNEY'S END : Robert Conway is greeted on Yarmouth beach by his son Sebastian after he completed his marathon challenge.

A hero's welcome for the man who rowed his way round Norfolk

■ **FULL STORY – PAGE NINE**

NEWS DIGEST

NORFOLK

Final pieces in major school reform jigsaw

PAGE 11

NORFOLK

Plans to rid county of road holes misery

PAGE 15

HETHEL

It's a glittering birthday for diamond Lotus

PAGE 13

EDP2

What's hot at London fashion week



SHARON GRIFFITHS

So what, exactly, is the point of pubs?

PAGE 8



SPORT

The City slickers are on the way up...



EIGHT-PAGE CANARIES PULL-OUT



East of England
CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY

Remember...

Your local Co-op no longer provides free carrier bags - so please remember to bring yours when you shop with us!

There will be a range of environmentally friendly alternatives ranging from 1p to 99p available in store.

*Applies to Supermarkets, Food Stores & Petrol Forecourts.

FREE
BAG FOR LIFE!**

**When you spend £10 or more, valid until 20th September 2008. One bag per customer per single transaction. Limited offer.

Valid at any East of England Co-op Supermarket or Food Store.

Building a better Society
www.eastofengland.coop

Booking system failing patients – LibDem MP

■ FROM PAGE ONE

difficulties getting through and when they have got through the information is not always correct, which has not been helpful.

“One person was told our gastroenterology department wasn’t open to choose and book, when it has been since August 2007.”

He said a “constructive” meeting was held with NHS Direct to look at how the system could be improved.

An NHS Norfolk spokesman said: “We are aware patients in Norfolk have problems accessing the national telephone helpline to book their appointments. There is no message system, so patients have to ring back. Once patients go through it has been identified that there is no slot available. That then comes back to us as an issue to deal with.”

She added that there had been some improvement recently.

North Norfolk MP and Liberal Democrat health spokesman Norman Lamb said: “I have had complaints from both constituents and doctors. The problems are causing immense frustration. What causes me most concern is people who are already frail and are trying to cope with a system not working properly. This is a much-heralded system to deliver choice and power to the patients but it seems to be doing neither.”

There are also issues around whether GPs are using the system properly. Some are giving their patients the national phone number

instead of giving them the chance of booking an appointment while they are still at the surgery.

Victoria Nicholls, 30, from Lowestoft, has been trying to use Choose and Book for an appointment with the dermatology department at James Paget University Hospital, Gorleston, since early August.

She was not given the chance to book while still at her GP but had to wait for a password to arrive by post.

She said: “I was told I could do it over the internet, but the system wouldn’t let me. I tried phoning a few times but it kept saying no-one was available, please try later. When I finally got through at the end of August, they said there aren’t any appointments and wait for the hospital to contact you. I haven’t heard anything.”

A Department of Health and NHS Direct spokesman said: “When the service is experiencing high call volumes, patients will receive a message telling them the service is busy and asking them to call back.

“Managing demand for services is a shared responsibility between primary care trusts and providers and they need to work together to ensure patients are treated at their choice of provider and are able to book their appointment electronically.

■ COMMENT – Page 18



ANNOYED: Betty Emmerson from Wells has had problems with the NHS Choose and Book telephone line.

CASE STUDY

Betty Emmerson, 78, from Wells, was left frustrated after trying to use Choose and Book to arrange checks on her cornea.

When she rang the service in May she was asked to call back a few days later and several days followed of being unable to get through. When she got through a week later she was told she would be sent an appointment by letter within seven to 14 days, but it arrived a month later. She said: “It has been a nightmare. It wasn’t ‘choose and book’. I couldn’t choose the hospital and I couldn’t book the time or date. Then I got a poll through asking me what I thought of the service, which really annoyed me.”

She said she had no problems with the treatment at the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital. Mrs Emmerson contacted her MP, Norman Lamb, who has taken the issue up with the N&N and the Department of Health. He received a letter from the hospital which said: “The appointment line operators are consistently giving the wrong information to patients. The line is continually engaged and patients are told, when the phone is eventually answered, to ring back when the lines are quieter. This is not following guidance.”

The response from the Department of Health said Choose and Book was “a big step forward” and “the vast majority of people who use the system appreciate it”.

FLIXTON

Wildlife haven goes under hammer

By VICTORIA NICHOLLS

Imagine yourself as king of your very own ancient woodland, a glorious haven where you can wander to your heart’s content, hear only leaves rustling gently in the wind and may even catch a glimpse of wild deer.

If this sounds like a dream then pinch yourself and dig deep into your pockets, because a stunning 53-acre wood in Suffolk, part of which dates back to at least 1600, goes under the hammer next month.

Abbey and Packway Wood, outside the village of Flixton, near Bungay, is expected to fetch £130,000-£160,000.

The auction prompts a mix of emotions for George Danby, 85, and his family, who own the land.

Beccles born-and-bred Mr Danby said the woods held many happy memories for him and his sister, Iris Brown, 88, but he believes it is time to move on.

“We are both getting too old to enjoy it as we used to,” he said.

“We used to love walking through it.”

Mr Danby recalled fond memories such as family picnics with his wife and three children and taking them to see snowdrops blanketing the forest floor in white every winter.

“The kids used to play hide and seek, but they live too far away to really enjoy it now,” he said. “I will be sorry to see it go in a way.”

The majority of the woodland is protected by its status as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and is home to red, roe and muntjac deer. Their hoof tracks are telltale signs that they are never far away.

Since his brother John bought the land in 1961, the family has left nature to its own devices, clearing only ivy to safeguard the woodland’s oak, hazel and ash trees.



SYLVAN SETTING: George Danby inside the Abbey and Packway Wood at Flixton which is expected to sell for between £130,000 and £160,000.

Mr Danby said: “My late brother always loved woods, so he bought it intending to make it a haven for wildlife. We hope someone interested in conservation will buy it and look after it.”

No ancient woodland would be

complete without its share of toadstools, and this one is no exception, also harbouring bluebells, orchids and even wild garlic.

It is also a haven for a rare type of plant, the thin spoked wood sedge.

The woodland used to belong to a

former Augustinian abbey in Flixton, and in the second world war formed part of the Flixton Airfield US Air Force base.

Durrants auctioneer Nicholas Rudge said the sale was a rare opportunity.

“We’ve sold woodland by auction before and that has always commanded lots of interest, but ancient woodland is very unusual,” he said.

The auction takes place at Durrants in Beccles on October 1.

Picture: ANDY DARNELL

Change does not bring guarantees

In some ways, the Labour Party is the Newcastle United of politics. Pick a popular leader, then bitch and backbite until the organisation implodes. For the Toon Army, one wonders whether it will end in relegation. For the government, there is usually only one result when the electorate gets wind of internal division – exile to opposition. Voters are not impressed with public displays of disloyalty. Each of the steady stream of plotters who have chosen to undermine their leader will eventually put themselves to the test in their own constituencies. Let's not forget the rebels sharpening their daggers would have been among the adoring party faithful who welcomed Mr Brown's anointing with such apparent joy. Is this attempted coup a measure of their lack of judgment, or does it demonstrate how desperate the rank and file are to breathe new life into the dying New Labour beast?

At the moment, there is a sense that they are raging against the dying of the light. Like the pet shop owner in the Monty Python sketch who insists the dead parrot is alive, they appear to be clutching at invisible straws. What makes them so sure that a change of leader will make any difference? And if they are sure, who is the leader-in-waiting?

There is nobody who stands out as having the charisma, ideas and drive to reverse the decline. Teflon Tony Blair timed his escape to perfection, handing the baton to Mr Brown just as the economy tilted towards a nosedive. The dour ex-chancellor has certainly proved to be far less adept in the driving seat than he was during a decade of holding the map and giving directions. But any new leader would face the same global problems that he faces. And it is next to impossible to find national solutions to global problems.

As the Tories found to their cost in the wilderness years from 1997, a change of leadership brings no guarantee of a change of fortune.

Make the system work

The much-vaunted Choose and Book system, designed to give patients the power to decide where and when they go to hospital, has always been a great idea – in theory. In practice, however, like so many “eureka” moments at Whitehall, it does not do what it says on the tin. The upshot of the situation is that a system that was by no means perfect but was working has been superseded by a system that could be fantastic but is not working. Maybe it is time for ministers to swallow their pride and go for a new approach – out with the new and in with the old. Or maybe they could try something totally radical: making the new system work.

Yes, the idea of asking a posse of public servants to deliver an efficient and effective system sounds like a crazy dream. But there is so much to like about Choose and Book's ambition to put patients in the driving seat that it is worth investing more time and effort.

At the moment, it appears local hospitals and local people are the innocent victims of national ineptitude presided over by NHS Direct.

The organisation needs to take direct action to resolve the problems, while some GPs either need better advice or more attention to detail.

Courage to keep going

Robert Conway's superhuman effort in the last week was a far cry from the childhood rhyme “Row, row, row your boat gently down the stream”. The father-of-five turned what ought to be a sedate pastime into a gruelling bout of self-torture. Towering waves, relentless rain and a score of blisters on each hand: it's not something many of us would do for fun. In fact, few would even do it for charity. So hats off to Mr Conway for having the courage and conviction to undertake the 300-mile journey. And for keeping going when the going got tough, while most of us would have got going – home.

BIBLE TEXT

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.

Romans – 8, 28

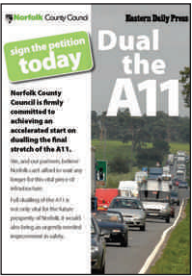
For a commentary on this text by one of the EDP's team of Christian writers, visit www.edp24.co.uk/bibletext



LETTERS&EMAILS

A11 vital route for travellers

ALAN THOMAS, Shepherd Close, Sheringham. Philip Hardy's letter (September 10) appears to be calling for some form of 'Fortress Norfolk' in his objection to the dualling of the entire A11, stating that “big companies want better access so they can put local companies out of business”. Apart from the fact that constant congestion is far more likely to increase CO2 emissions, there are millions of private motorists who regularly use this vital route to and from the outside world in visiting friends and relatives, to go on holiday or even to work, who may disagree with his view. Thankfully, Mr Hardy is not calling for restrictions on those threatening outsiders who bring us our energy supplies, so at least we can relax in the thought that any splendid isolation won't be a



A11 is available online and at EDP offices. See www.EDP24.co.uk

I've been driven off the buses

JULIA GIBBS, Marine Parade, Gorleston. I, like many other Norfolk people, am committed to a greener lifestyle and consequently have been using the bus to get to work for the past 18 months. I have recently and reluctantly had to return to using my car. Nobody could say I did not give it a fair trial but First Buses must think its passengers are green in another, less complimentary, sense, if they think they can get away with the service they provide.

My last bus journey, on the X1 from Gorleston to my job at County Hall took me two hours. The bus I wanted did not turn up (again). The next refused to stop at County Hall but took me into the city where I had to get another bus to bring me out again.

The final straw was that I had to pay more for my journey (£5.80 return) as the prices have been increased. The next day, I went by car and it took me 30 minutes and cost about the same in fuel. At the end of my working day, my car was there waiting for me in the car park at the time I wanted to travel and I was home in 30 minutes. There is simply no encouragement for working people to use buses in Norfolk.

UEA graded among best for research

Prof TREVOR DAVIES, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (research), University of East Anglia. I would like to elaborate on Ian Gibson's remarks that UEA “does good research, but it's never going to be top drawer” (EDP, September 11). Ian is a great friend and supporter of UEA and I have always enjoyed my discussions with him about our research, as I have appreciated his help with our community activities. In the last national Research Assessment Exercise, we received the top accolade (5*)

for our research in Environmental Sciences, Film Studies and History – the latter being a higher grade than that achieved by Oxford in this subject. A further eight schools were deemed to be undertaking research of international excellence. This places UEA in the top seven per cent in the country on this measure and brings substantial investment and kudos to Norwich. Alongside this, we are proud to play a significant part in the local community and in supporting the aspirations of young people around the

region. We substantially exceed our benchmarks set by the Higher Education Funding Council for our intake of pupils from state school and from low participation neighbourhoods. Added to that, for the fourth year running we are in the top five institutions in the country for student satisfaction. Proof, if it were needed, that this is a University which makes a genuine difference to the lives of individuals and communities in the region and around the world.

Picture: PAUL HEWITT



SUPPORT: Specialist nurse Kit Tranter, pictured last week with patient Finlay Brown – whose mother, Dee, has nominated Kit for an award.

Always there for us

Mrs LILIAN COVERDALE, Thorpe Close, Thorpe St Andrew. Having read your article (EDP, September 2) regarding paediatric rheumatology specialist nurse Kit Tranter, who has been nominated for the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital Patients' Choice award, we would like to endorse every word.

Our grandson has been receiving treatment for the same problem since he was six years old and he is now 16. His treatment has not been comfortable or easy for him. But at every difficulty Kit was there, always with understanding and patience for him and for us. He will be 'moving on' to the Adult Department soon, but Kit has said that he can continue to contact her at any time.

Thankfully, as forecast, his condition has improved as he has grown up. We do not know what the future holds but with people like Kit, Dr Armon and Professor Scott alongside, we can move forward with hope. Thank you to them all and to the EDP for raising awareness of this condition.

Officials really to blame for losses

DEREK COOK, Middlestone Close, Gorleston. Regarding data loss (Letter, Sept 9), ultimately the government must be held to account, quite correct, but surely the blame lies with unnamed, untouchable and unsackable members of the Civil Service who actually

carry out the 'physical' task of running the country from Whitehall. Should a government change, the new rulers will inherit the same system as the outgoing government, possibly with cosmetic changes at the very top.

So should opposition leaders of any party feel inclined to 'make hay whilst the sun shines' it would be prudent of them to consider “There, but for the grace of God, go I.”

Give sirens to flood wardens

GLYNIS TEECE, Archibald Road, Walcott. I understood the police were there to serve the public. Having read your article on the police's refusal to commit to sounding the flood sirens (EDP, September 11), I now know this is not true. We who live in Walcott all know what the sounding of the siren means. The Environment Agency's automatic phone warning system is next to useless in this area, as our phone lines are above ground and liable to blow down in strong wind, while mobile phone reception is bad here. We back our flood wardens 100pc, and when they ask for the sirens it means we need them to warn all our residents of possible danger and to be ready to evacuate when asked to do so.

Our wardens, who are on the spot, know the conditions far better than a person sitting at a computer screen miles inland. Put the sirens in the hands of the flood wardens and let them sound them when we need them.

Great help for my dog at sea

JUNE ROUNCE, Northrepps Road, Cromer. I should like to thank all the kind people who helped me on the beach below the lighthouse on September 10. My dog was swimming out to sea chasing seagulls and getting further and further from the shore. My gratitude to the two ladies who rushed along the beach and called out the inshore rescue boat and the gentleman who must have shouted himself hoarse trying to attract the dog's attention. I was able, in the end, to get the dog back to shore just before the inshore crew arrived to offer their friendly assistance. I most sincerely thank you all.