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Improving health,
improving lives

NHS Choices annual report 2011

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Foreword by **SIR**
BRUCE
KEOGH
NHS Medical Director



NHS Choices is not just a website.

When millions effortlessly
use something every month
we need to recognise that
the public now view it as an
invaluable NHS service.

I have been involved in NHS Choices since its inception in 2007 and each year I am proud of its progress. As I write, NHS Choices has just recorded its second consecutive 10-million-visit month. Year-on-year that represents a 50% increase in traffic. With that level of usage it has to be doing something right.

Of course what NHS Choices does is fill a very real need in our digital age. By focusing on making every page findable through a Google search the team at NHS Choices is delivering high-quality reliable content to millions of people searching for answers but bewildered by the plethora of offers on the web.

NHS Choices has projected the NHS logo into the digital world and proved the public are looking for the same three things online as they are offline: quality, accuracy and convenience.

And the service continues to break new ground. Public comment has now been extended to every NHS service and hundreds of members of the public take time each month to write about their experiences good or bad. Hundreds of

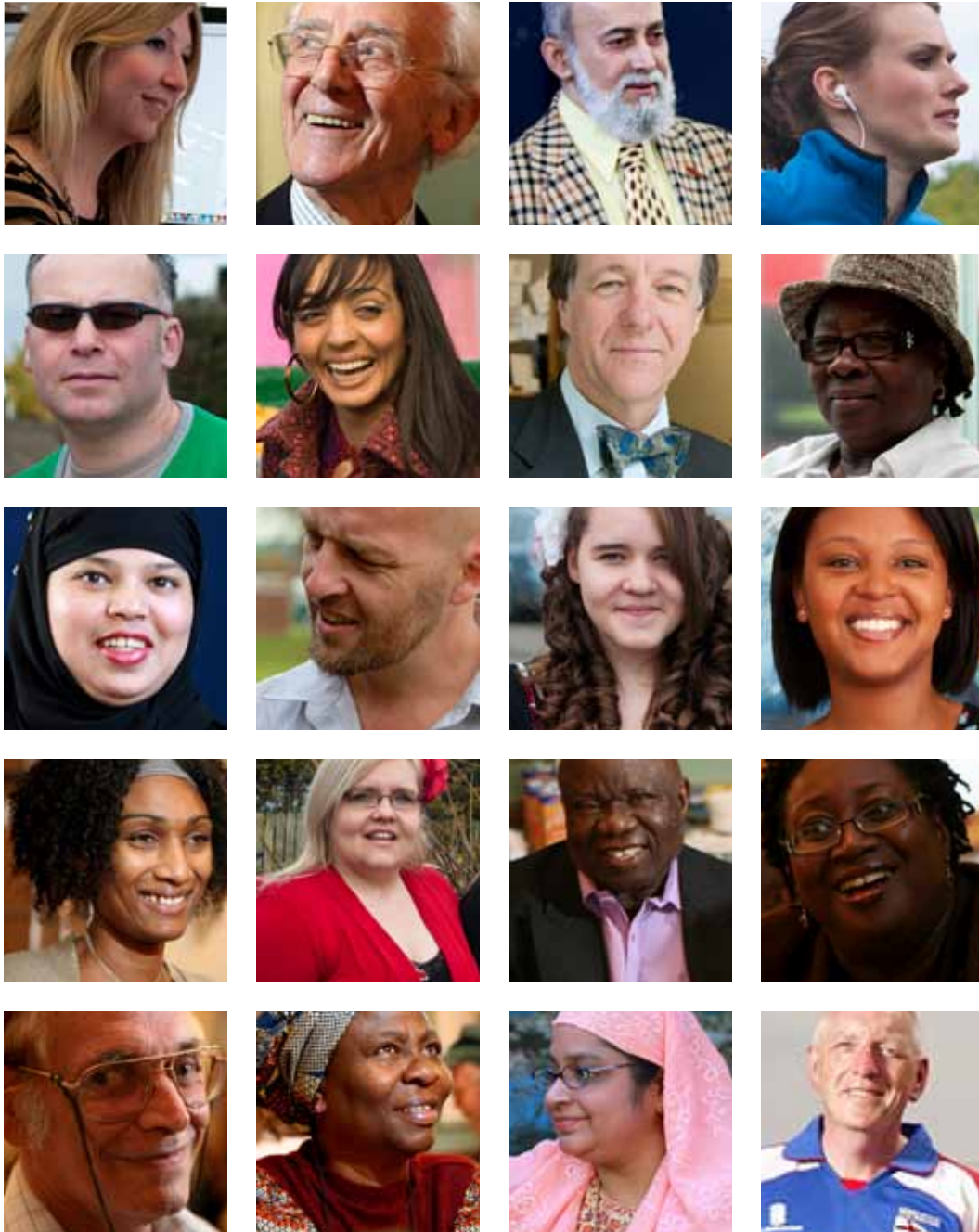
thousands of people every month use NHS Choices quality indicators to identify the best GP or hospital for them.

I am certain these two innovations will play an important role in driving the revolution in quality, efficiency and patient-centric services that the NHS needs to embrace to meet the challenges that confront it. What I have also seen this year is the potential of the service.

NHS Choices Mental Wellbeing pilot showed how a commonsense approach could bring measureable benefits to thousands of people and demonstrated the site's enormous potential as a clinical research platform.

Its pioneering approach to partnerships with commercial partners has generated mobile phone applications at no cost to the taxpayer and more than 100 charities can now deliver their information to the public through NHS Choices Information Prescription Service.

I commend this report and look forward to the year ahead.



- NHS Choices today
- Improving health, improving lives
- Real patient power
- Delivering for the NHS
- Your views

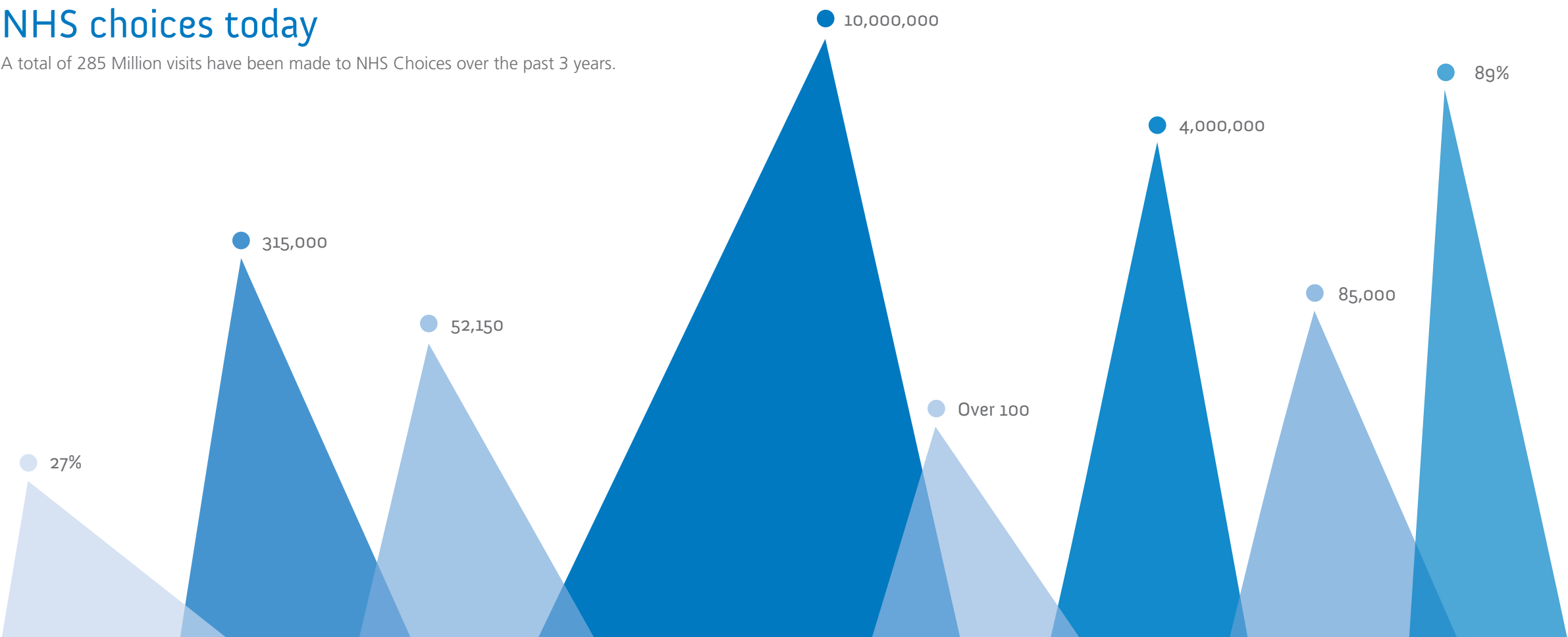


NHS CHOICES TODAY

NHS Choices is a free online NHS service, providing round-the-clock access to health information and advice for citizens in England. It also provides important resources for health professionals and people who care for family members and others.

NHS choices today

A total of 285 Million visits have been made to NHS Choices over the past 3 years.



27% of users make fewer trips to their GP as a result of visiting the site

315,000 ratings on 8,000 pages have been received, helping improve the NHS Choices site

52,150 Facebook fans and 33,000 Twitter followers now engage with NHS Choices via social media

The site now gets **10 million** visits every month

More than **100** interactive tools have been created, including downloadable widgets and mobile apps

4 million e-newsletters have been sent to NHS Choices account holders

85,000 comments from members of the public published

Site satisfaction among users is **89%**

A typical NHS Choices user

Female – almost twice as many women as men use NHS Choices.

Younger – almost two-thirds are under 45, a greater proportion than in the general population.

A parent – a third of NHS Choices users have children under 18.

Has a long-term condition – a third of NHS Choices users have a long-term health condition.

Caring for someone – a quarter of site users care for a family member, friend or neighbour.

People come to NHS Choices for a wide ranges of reasons:

“

To find out if my brittle nails are a symptom of underactive thyroid, and what to do about it. I’m now on medication to manage the condition and feel much better.

“

To check mine and my daughter’s BMI. We’re trying to get healthier.

“

To check what health problems I need to look out for when I go travelling.

“

To see if my mum had a kidney infection. It’s one of my favourite websites – I always use it if I have any health questions.

“

To check symptoms of chickenpox and whether we need to take my little boy to the doctor. It’s great for looking up symptoms before seeing a GP.

IMPROVING HEALTH, IMPROVING LIVES

NHS Choices gives people the tools to take greater responsibility for their health so they can lead longer, fitter lives.

Couch to 5k is a running programme created by NHS Choices. Since launch it has been downloaded more than 2.1 million times and become one of the most popular running podcasts in the iTunes store.



Content for healthier lives

The government is under more pressure than ever to tackle wide-ranging public health problems; Britain is the most obese nation in Europe, more than 80,000 lives a year are lost through smoking, and poor mental health is responsible for nearly a quarter of overall illness.

NHS Choices continues to provide content to inspire people to change their behaviour to be healthier and, if ill, to seek appropriate treatment. **Live Well**, NHS Choices' magazine-style healthy living section, covers more than 100 topics, and has become the definitive Government advice source for nutrition after the migration of content from the Food Standards Agency.



Multimedia

NHS Choices has added further to its video library this year. It now offers more than 620 videos that can be viewed on the site or on YouTube, and can be embedded in other websites with a simple code download.

NHS Choices also offers more than 100 interactive tools, including health assessments, lifestyle checkers, symptom checkers, and more. **LifeCheck**, one of NHS Choices' flagship tools, has been revamped this year. The rich media application generates an individual health profile and health tips tailored to personal needs.



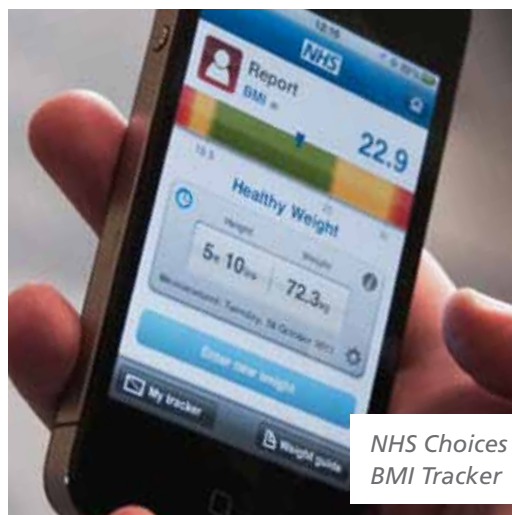
LifeCheck has become an invaluable resource. We use the tool collaboratively with patients to help them understand a range of risk factors and to give them confidence in making decisions to improve their health.

Dr Mike Dixon, NHS Alliance

Bringing the NHS into the digital age

NHS Choices has been working with third-sector and industry partners to redefine the way that health information is accessed via the internet with the aim of making it more flexible and accessible for more people.

The service now syndicates content to more than 300 **commercial partners** including Johnston Press, one of the largest local newspaper publishers in the UK, FamilyGP.com, the health media publishing company behind the Virgin and Yahoo health portals, and Boardworks, who provide software designed for school teachers.



NHS Choices BMI Tracker

Mobile applications

Mobile companies including Blackberry and Nokia have recently come on board to help NHS Choices develop ways to surface NHS Choices content through mobile handsets. In addition, a range of new tools for iPhone users has been developed, including a revamped **BMI tracker**, which has become one of the most popular weight management tools in the Apple store, and **Couch to 5k**, a downloadable running plan which users can listen to on MP3 players.



Couch to 5k users can share their experiences online through a dedicated forum on NHS Choices



“

I've tried running before but found it difficult and never stuck to it, but Couch to 5k was different. It was great to hear advice as I ran, especially to go slowly. I've been building up over time and recently ran my first 10k.

Hilary Jones, Couch to 5k runner

Reaching people

This year, NHS Choices has continued to lead the way in providing the means to reach specific groups using digital technology:

Excluded groups

With partners Race Online 2012 and UK online centres, NHS Choices has inspired more people to get online to improve their health. This won the National eWell-Being Award for reaching digitally excluded groups.



NHS Choices supporting Spring Online Week in May 2011



Hep C campaign using kiosks in a women's prison

Offender health

To tackle health problems among the prison population, NHS Choices worked with prisons in Derbyshire to provide ways for inmates to access health information digitally, through **kiosk technology**. Female prison inmates learned about symptoms of hepatitis C, while male prisoners used semi-diagnostic kiosks to get personalised health checks.



Jasmine's family featured in Carers Direct video diaries

Supporting carers

Carers Direct has added an interactive guide to benefits and improved the way that carers' services are presented. **Carers Direct** has also worked to raise the profile of caring roles more generally. Jasmine, a teenager with multiple conditions, and her family, featured in videos to highlight issues for carers and the cared-for.



Through Carers Direct, we feel we were able to help others in a similar situation by sharing our own experiences.

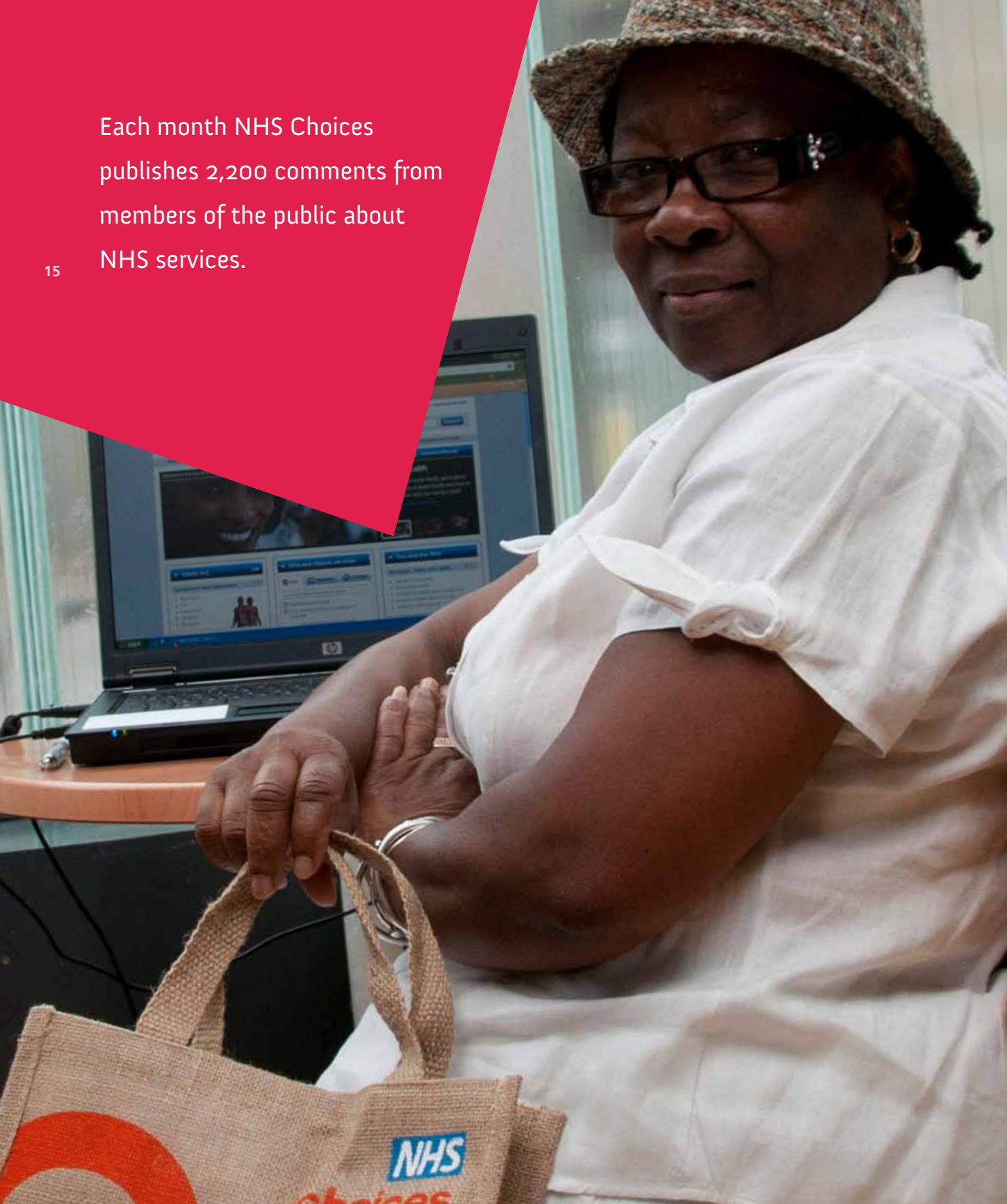
Jasmine's mother & carer, Marie

Mental wellbeing

This year, NHS Choices delivered an online **mental wellbeing** pilot – the first of its kind in the UK. More than 2,000 participants took part in the trial to test the use of an internet based CBT training tool available at users' convenience, 24 hours a day. Results showed improvements in mental wellbeing and NHS Choices is now exploring national roll-out.

Each month NHS Choices publishes 2,200 comments from members of the public about NHS services.

15



REAL PATIENT POWER



Taxpayers put a lot of money into the NHS. It's only right that when they use it, they should have the power to shape it. But there's another argument for real patient power. When patients do have their say, and are able to make choices, they get better results, and they manage long-term conditions more successfully too. David Cameron, June 2011

16

Giving patients their say

NHS Choices provides ways for people to read and give comments on their healthcare experience.

Users can leave comments on almost every page and almost every NHS service, including pharmacists, dentists and opticians. New functionality means that NHS Choices can also aggregate comments from any **patient feedback** website. Patient Opinion, the well-known patient engagement organisation, has come on board, and it is anticipated that more providers will follow.

Bedside feedback

It's important for people to have a range of ways to interact about their healthcare experiences.

This year, NHS Choices has continued to develop pioneering ways for users to give feedback in real time – even while in hospital.

In response to a House of Commons Health Committee report, NHS Choices has introduced - for the first time in the UK – the facility for patients to comment on their hospital experience via tablet PCs at the hospital bedside. Working with **Hospedia** and **Patient Opinion**, the service was piloted at Broomfield Hospital in Essex where it has proved a popular feature amongst patients.

Text-message commenting

NHS Choices has been working with hospital trusts to discover how text messaging can provide a way for patients to rate their hospital experience.

Pilots in West Hertfordshire and London, where ward visitors or patients took part in short text surveys, have demonstrated the potential for this as a way of **improving patient engagement**. In all instances, the number of users who responded to the mobile route was more than double the number engaging on paper or online. Staff were also positive about the potential for texting to appeal to a more diverse audience than traditional routes, for example younger people and those who may intend to feed back online but fail (or forget) to do so. NHS Choices is now working on strategies to roll out mobile phone feedback more widely

More than 80% of GP practices have been rated or commented on by patients. Numerous have more than 50 comments.

Almost 4,000 replies from GP practices, mainly about how services have been improved.

Making information easier

NHS Choices has made decision-making easier for patients in a range of ways.

People having an operation are better able to understand every stage in the process, from referral to recovery, through NHS Choices Surgery Planner.

Those with limited command of English can now make use of NHS Choices' world-class health content through Google Translate, which is available on every page and provides automated translation into more than 50 languages.

For the first time in England, people can now more easily find out about taking part in clinical trials, through a searchable directory on NHS Choices.

It's easier for clinicians to help patients through the Information Prescription service, which is supported by over 100 charity partners and provides more than 200 downloadable condition guides.

Expectant mothers find it easier to plan antenatal services and where to have their baby, through improved maternity comparison information.

People making choices about hospitals can make comparisons more easily about issues that matter to them, such as cleanliness, level of service, parking and treatments on offer.

DELIVERING FOR THE NHS

NHS Choices provides important resources for health and care professionals. The Royal College of GPs, the British Dental Association, and the Royal College of Nursing now regularly use NHS Choices content and encourage members to make use of the site in their work. Nurses and other health professionals have been central to the year's activities; the number of community nurses who are aware of NHS Choices has doubled since last year.



NHS Choices makes
my job, working with parents
of young children, easier.
It improves the interaction
between me and my clients,
making them more engaged -
and me better informed.

Nicola Joseph, health visitor



Trusted content for the public sector

NHS Choices is eliminating duplication of effort – and cost – in the NHS and wider government, by providing free syndicated content for NHS trusts' local websites as well as a host of other organisations.

Syndication feeds now serve more than 433 public sector organisations, with a further 300 looking to implement soon. It is also easier for organisations without technical expertise to make the most of syndication feeds. Widgets have been developed to enable organisations to easily embed content on their site.



Local councils and NHS Choices

Every month, one in three of us use our local council website, often to find information on health services. At the same time, as part of the NHS reforms, councils are taking on more responsibilities for local health services, including commissioning and public health. As a result, the public will increasingly expect councils to provide high-quality health information. In response, NHS Choices offers **free, syndicated content** to more than a third of local councils.



Supporting local providers

It's important that health organisations at a local level can manage the way that their information is presented online. On NHS Choices, providers can log in to edit their own service information. This has been the case for GP surgeries since 2010, and in the past 12 months this has extended to dental, pharmacy and optician profiles.

Working in partnership

This year, NHS Choices has provided digital expertise to support local and national partners in a range of ways.

Flagship campaigns

We have continued to build and host a range of flagship health campaign sites, including Dementia, Act F.A.S.T on stroke, and [Change4Life](#), to support the Department of Health Communications Directorate. New ways to engage the target audience such as mobile text messaging and email communications have been developed for these campaigns.



Local campaigns

NHS Choices has worked with NHS trusts across the country to deliver local health campaigns and information programmes. NHS Choices Lambeth is a public-facing microsite, providing news and features for the community to enable greater [community participation](#) and promote local health services. NHS Choices also partnered with NHS Liverpool in spring 2011, launching a roadshow in which residents received advice on dental service access in their area via text messaging.



Shaping future policy

NHS Choices worked with the Department of Health this year in supporting the [Personal Health Budgets](#) strategy through digital technology. A forum provides a way for people on the scheme to talk to others and to provide feedback to shape the strategy.

NHS Choices has also been supporting the national NHS Health Checks programme, publishing results from a trial in partnership with NHS Tower Hamlets which used digital technology – kiosks and handheld devices – to provide cardiovascular health assessments. More than [2,000 health assessments](#) took place and many participants said that they acted to improve their health after the assessment, by losing weight or taking 30 minutes more exercise.



Efficiency and effectiveness

27

Use of NHS Choices results in fewer GP visits, bringing **cost-savings** to the NHS and demonstrating the opportunities offered by putting appropriate information and services online.

A study in April 2011 conducted by NHS Choices showed that 63% of participants said they used the website in relation to a GP visit. Most (74%) used the site before an intended visit, 4% during, and 55% after. Around a third (31%) used it both before and after.



Among those using the site only prior to an intended GP visit, 36% said they went less often as a result. Of all those who took part, 27% reported a **reduction in the number of GP visits** they made.

Comparisons with previous research also show increased feelings of **empowerment**, knowledge and confidence in 2011 compared to 2010, particularly among those who used NHS Choices both before and after a visit to the GP.



These changes in behaviour show the opportunities to reduce costs and **improve patient experience** that are presented – and already being delivered – by the NHS Choices service, whether online or through the various mobile and other delivery channels now available.

28

YOUR VIEWS

NHS Choices is successful because users' views are listened to.

This year we have:

Listened to more than 4,000 professionals about how the service can better meet their needs.

Received opinions from more than 16,500 members of the public.

Spent more than 100 hours in direct conversations with users, collaboratively designing a better NHS Choices service.

Introduced a 'star rating' system on most pages to enable any user to easily provide their view.

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK.

How do you think NHS Choices could help more people in England become healthier?

What else can we do to continue to empower citizens with health information to enable effective decision making?

How can we continue to help NHS organisations and the public sector at large to deliver a modern health service?

SEND US YOUR IDEAS

email: feedback@nhschoices.nhs.uk

text: FUTURE to 64746