The University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust operates from hospital sites in Barrow, Kendal and Lancaster, covering a population of 365,000.

The trust receives around 49,000 patient appointments per month.

In May 2018, the trust reviewed a sample of 100 e-Referral Service (e-RS) referrals against 100 paper referrals to understand the patient benefits.

From an analysis across 20 clinical specialities, the findings revealed that on average patients received an appointment eight days faster when referrals were made via e-RS.

The above graph shows the difference between paper and e-Referrals for seven of the specialities analysed.

e-RS streamlines the process of booking a hospital appointment. Patients can discuss their referral with practice staff and choose their preferred provider. They receive details of their appointment as part of their GP consultation or shortly after.

The electronic system reduces the risk of either the referral appointment letter getting lost and the patient not receiving an appointment. What’s more, all clinically appropriate services are displayed in one location and the patients can choose the hospital or clinic they want to attend, which reduces the number of ‘did not attend’. Referrals made electronically also reduces the time and costs associated with printing and photocopying referrals and then sending these to the hospital.

In summary, e-RS is:

- secure – transfers confidential patient information electronically
- efficient – reduces wait times for patients and reduces costs associated with paper referrals
- transparent – a fully auditable system that helps to manage demand and capacity.

Patients using e-RS are:

- waiting less for appointments and therefore their care has improved
- confident they are accessing the right services and getting appointments swiftly
- less likely of being booked on to an inappropriate appointment.

On average patients received an appointment 8 days faster using e-RS!