A patient at the Editor’s practice complained about the automatic password generated on his Choose and Book appointment request page. The Editor is a GP in Guildford and his practice, like most in the English NHS, uses this electronic system to book appointments with specialists in secondary care. The Choose and Book system is basically a good idea – it displays the options available to the patient and they can choose the hospital or clinic they would like to attend. In reality incorporating Choose and Book into the clinical consultation can be challenging for clinicians and patients report not receiving the choice the system was intended to provide.\(^1,2\)

The consulting GP has the option in Choose and Book to print off an “Appointment request” page for the patient. The patient then calls the telephone number on the request sheet and books an appointment at a time that suits them. The sheet generates a password for the patient to use – made up of two separate words. The two words generated for this patient were ‘Poppy’ and ‘Cock’. The patients felt this was offensive and complained.

‘Poppycock’ means nonsense or rubbish and is generally used as an expletive. It was first recorded in the mid-19th century in America. It was thought by some to derive from the Dutch word for soft faeces ‘Pappekak’ though the authenticity of this is challenged. Instead it is more likely to be derived from the Dutch expression: ‘Zo fijn als gemalen poppekak’, – used to imply excessive religious zeal; but literally translated meaning ‘As fine as powdered doll s**t’.\(^3\)

The informatics challenge is how to avoid generating two word passwords which when combined creates something offensive. Maybe some words like ‘cock’ should be totally avoided? Possibly the combined words should also be screened for potential offensiveness.

---

**Figure 1** The Choose and Book appointment request printout
Generation of unfortunate passwords can now be added to the literature on the problems and challenges of using Choose and Book.

REFERENCES
2 Green J, McDowall Z and Potts HW. Does Choose & Book fail to deliver the expected choice to patients? A survey of patients’ experience of outpatient appointment booking. BMC Med Inform Decis Mak 2008;8:36.