



### Letter from NHS England to GPs using 084 numbers

The news release “[NHS England calls on GPs to end use of expensive 084 numbers](#)” now includes [a link](#) to the communications from the Primary Care Commissioning National Support Centre of NHS England issued on Monday 4 November 2013.

The items that follow below represent the components.

There are three items:

- ☐ A letter from Dr David Geddes, Head of Primary Care Commissioning, to the Directors of the 27 Area Teams. (1 page)
- ☐ A pro forma to be used by Area Teams as the frontispiece of their letters to all practices using 084 numbers. (1 page)
- ☐ The body of the communication, reminding practices of their contractual obligations and requesting details of their plans for moving away from 084 numbers. (2 pages)

The latter item, which includes the important “myth busting” section is available separately here - [Letter to all practices using 084 numbers](#).

We suggest that patients may wish to print out a copy and invite their practice to advise them, as well as the NHS England Area Team, of their **“plans for swiftly moving away from the use of 084 numbers”**



**Letter from Dr David Geddes, Head of Primary Care  
Commissioning, to the Directors of the 27 Area Teams**

Dear colleagues

An NHS England audit earlier this year has identified the scale of the continued use of 084 numbers in General Practice. It has also given us greater awareness of the problems perceived by general practice in migrating to an alternative number that costs no more to a caller than a local number. The information we received indicated that there are approximately 8% of Practices nationally still using 084 numbers.

Continued use of 084 numbers impacts disproportionately on some members of the public, potentially, those patients who are more vulnerable or who fall into lower socio-economic groups. As a consequence, Mike Bewick, Deputy Medical Director, and I have drafted the letter (attached as an appendix) that we would be grateful could be adapted and forwarded from yourselves to those Practices still using 084 numbers for patients to access their surgery.

The letter in addition to reminding Practices about their contractual obligations highlights the possible impact on health inequalities and access to health care and asks that Practices confirm their intention to not renew any contracts that are near to expiry and to confirm their plans with you regarding the 'reasonable steps' that they have, or aim to take to remedy this on-going problem.

It would be helpful if area teams could actively monitor progress against practice plans. Our intention is to re-audit the use of 084 numbers in 2014 so that NHS England can be assured that actions have resulted in movement away from this practice

I thank you in advance for your help and support.

David Geddes

Dr David Geddes  
Head of Primary Care Commissioning  
NHS England



## **fair telecoms campaign**

## **copy of letter**



**pro forma to be used by Area Teams as the frontispiece of their letters to all practices using 084 numbers**

Dear [REDACTED],

Please see below communication from the Dr Mike Bewick; the Deputy Medical Director and Dr David Geddes; Head of Primary Care Commissioning at the National Support Centre of NHS England in respect of the continued use of 084 numbers in general practice. This communication reiterates the contractual obligation to take all reasonable steps to move away from operating a 084 number, the reasons why this is important from a health inequalities perspective and what you as a Practice can do to achieve this.

Could I request that you respond outlining your plans after digesting the contents of the letter by email to; [REDACTED]. For Practices whose contracts are due to expire shortly, could I have the expiry date and confirmation that you will not be seeking to review that or similar contract?

Many thanks and I look forward to hearing from you by [REDACTED].

Yours faithfully

[REDACTED]



## **Letter to all practices using 084 numbers**

Dear colleagues;

*Re; use of 084 numbers in General Practice*

In April 2010 there was a contractual obligation placed on Practices regarding use of telephone numbers for which "having regard to the arrangement as a whole, persons pay more to make relevant calls than they would to make equivalent calls to a geographical number". Entering into, renewing or extending such use was prohibited and those already using such numbers were required to take all reasonable steps to bring their use to an end. This was in recognition of the increased cost to the caller in dialling 084 numbers, use of 087 numbers having already been prohibited. Whilst we recognise that Practices may well have entered in to these contracts in good faith to improve the options for callers in many cases (queuing functions etc); it remains that there is, in the majority of cases, an additional cost to the caller and this impacts upon the public disproportionately, potentially exacerbating health inequalities.

This letter reiterates the prime importance of fair access for all patients

The National Audit Office recently reported on this matter urging the government to deal with the issue in respect of its own numbers. The report noted, "Vulnerable and low income households rely disproportionately on mobile pay-as-you-go telephone deals. These incur high charges for Freephone and higher rate lines. Cabinet Office guidance states that it is inappropriate to use higher rate numbers when dealing with people on low incomes or vulnerable groups."

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills recently published draft regulations which will prohibit the use of all expensive numbers (084, 087 and 09) for customer enquiry lines by businesses.

It is now acknowledged that fully inclusive Call Plans (e.g. BT Unlimited Anytime) are the most popular overall. This will obviously be seen most clearly amongst those who are at home during the day. Calls to 084 numbers are excluded from these plans (barring some such numbers from some providers) making the premium cost 100%.

Where queuing arrangements are associated with a premium cost, this impacts most unfairly on those who cannot afford to stay on the line for long periods. This inequity is exacerbated if a cheaper alternative number is offered in parallel, as the caller cannot be sure of being answered in turn, as such a lesser service is provided to those with the least ability to pay.

As one organisation NHS England has been working to understand the extent of this practice nationally and the perceived barriers to Practices migrating to a geographical rate number in order to consider what strategies can be adopted to address this on-going difficulty.





## **Letter to all practices using 084 numbers**

With thanks to the '*fair telecoms campaign*' we are able to outline some facts and bust some myths regarding the use of 084 numbers.

**Belief;** Many Practices believe that the only way for them to withdraw from a current telephony contract is by paying a (sometimes considerable) penalty

**Response;** The telecoms industry in general, and leading providers of surgery telephone systems including Daisy Group, providers of the Surgery Line system, permit migration from 084 to geographic rate numbers at any time within the term of existing system and network telephone service arrangements, without penalty. The additional on-going cost incurred on migration from a 084 to geographic rate number represents the loss of the subsidy that has previously been provided, at the expense of patients and other callers.

It is NHS England's view that this represents one "reasonable" step that a practice could take

**Belief;** Offering a geographical alternative in parallel to a 084 number represents 'reasonable steps' until the 084 contract expires

**Response;** Providing an 084 number as a better service / higher cost alternative in parallel with a standard geographical option, is an unacceptable misrepresentation of what is meant by "choice" in the NHS. The NHS does not offer distinct tiers of service based on ability to pay

Access to general practice remains a key concern to patients and a strategic objective for NHS England as the commissioner. We look to Practices to work with us on this and many have already embraced new and innovative ways of ensuring good access using digital technologies. We are keen to hear of those initiatives that meet with the approval of patients and help Practices to respond to patient need and manage their workload. If you have such examples please email; [england.primarycareops@nhs.net](mailto:england.primarycareops@nhs.net)

Your Area Team will be in touch to understand your plans for swiftly moving away from the use of 084 numbers.

Many thanks

Dr Mike Bewick (Deputy Medical Director)

Dr David Geddes (Head of Primary Care Commissioning)

