

**BBC Radio 5 Live Investigates ...  
GP surgeries which charge patients a premium rate**

I was delighted to represent the **fair telecoms campaign** by contributing to this radio broadcast on Sunday 10 February 2013. Relevant clips may be heard at [this link](#).

Contributors in person and by message referred to specific cases throughout the UK, of which there are around 1,000 - local lists may be found from [this map](#) - more recent lists are available.

The point was made that many practices have chosen to use non-geographic numbers unaware of the cost and of who is meeting it. It was fairly added that officers of the NHS have made similar mistakes and that GPs which have not made this mistake should be seen separately from those which have, or are breaching their contracts knowingly.

The full **fair telecoms campaign** summary of the issue (with links to detail) is [published here](#).

The following points were covered in the radio broadcast:

- Adoption of expensive numbers by GPs was prohibited by contract changes applied from April 2010 in England and Wales.
- Existing users had until April 2011 to change their arrangements.
- Confusion has been deliberately deployed to evade compliance.

We are now explicitly calling for the following action:

- **Ministers of the four national governments**, responsible for our "National" Health Service must clearly assert the principle that **the cost of providing NHS services must not be subsidised by indirect payments from patients as they access these services**. The "Service Charge", which is invariably one component of the charge paid when calling a 084 number, makes this a clear example of a breach of a fundamental principle of the NHS.

Their respective failures to explicitly address this point undermine the concept that the NHS is "National". The England Minister, Dr Dan Poulter, has repeatedly evaded his duties (see [this](#)).

- **Local NHS bodies, and the nascent NHS Commissioning Board for England**, must ensure that all GPs which wish to serve the NHS are prepared to follow its principles by complying with the terms of their legally enforceable contracts. Those who wish to fund their practices by payments from patients must leave the NHS, or campaign for its abolition.
- **Practices** which have chosen to use the additional features available with non-geographic telephone numbers, must swiftly switch to the 034 equivalent of their 084 number for the remainder of the period that they choose, or are committed, to use these facilities.

We believe that General Practitioners, especially those who have taken on the sizeable commercial responsibility associated with leading Clinical Commissioning Groups, must accept their responsibility to manage their practice budgets and not be hoodwinked by external providers. Meeting their costs without subsidy at the expense of patients, the effect of migrating from 084 to 034, should be considered as a challenge they are able to meet.

