

NHS GPs in Kent using 0844 telephone numbers, in breach of their contracts

The email quoted below was sent, to the first group listed [here](#) and copied to others named, on 7 September 2012 at 15.03. The full detailed circulation list is given [here](#).

Briefing from the **fair telecoms campaign**

The **fair telecoms campaign** has been engaged with the issue of NHS GP's using 084 telephone numbers for many years.

A recent item on **BBC South East Today** covered the issue ([watch here](#)), with a focus on those contracted to **NHS Kent and Medway**. The same material was also covered by **BBC Radio Kent** ([listen here](#)).

Special attention was given to the **Wye Surgery**, however the issues are essentially the same for all of the [practices listed](#) at the foot of this message. Of particular concern must be the many practices that have adopted 084 numbers after the ban on their use was introduced. The most recent case (the **Broomfield surgery in Herne Bay**) occurred on 24 August 2012 - the day on which the TV item was broadcast!

Why calls to 0844 numbers are more expensive

The 0844 numbers listed generate a subsidy of around 4/5 pence per minute, which is paid by the telephone company originating the call to that terminating it - **Talk Talk** in the case of all of the numbers listed. The subsidy is used by **Talk Talk** to cover the costs of providing a non-geographic number and associated facilities, with the balance paid on and typically applied against the cost of leased telephone equipment used by the surgery.

Every call originating telephone company passes on the cost of paying this subsidy to its customers (where it is known as a "**Service Charge**"). In addition, it may add an "**Access Charge**" to its own benefit, although **BT** is uniquely prohibited from doing this by regulation. Except in some unusual cases, e.g. where the caller incurs a penalty charge for making a call outside the terms of their chosen Call Plan, this invariably makes the cost of a call to a 0844 number greater than that of an equivalent call to a geographic number.

(See [this table](#) of relative charges for commonly used telephone call services, with links to the published tariffs. See also [more comprehensive information](#).)

The GP contract revisions

In April 2010, revisions were made to the NHS GP contracts to prohibit use of numbers that caused callers to pay more than the cost of an equivalent call to a geographic number. Those already using such numbers had twelve months in which to take "reasonable steps" to modify their arrangements, "**to ensure that, having regard to the arrangement as a whole, persons will not pay more to make relevant calls than they would to make equivalent calls to a geographical number**".

For those committed to long term telephone service contracts, the easiest way of moving to compliance is to retain their contract, but migrate from the 084 number being used to the equivalent 034 number, e.g. 0844 387 8419 to 0344 387 8419.

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Calls to all 03 numbers are charged on exactly the same basis as calls to geographic numbers by all telephone service providers and for all tariff arrangements. There is no subsidy passed between the telephone companies. The provider of the 0844 number has guaranteed access to the 0344 equivalent, and all of its interests are fully protected on migration, so there is no valid reason to refuse a request for such migration within the terms of an existing telephone service arrangement. (see [notes below](#))

The policy adopted by NHS Kent and Medway

Papers issued by **NHS Kent and Medway** demonstrate that its officers have totally failed to understand this issue, as it is explained above, and have therefore failed to enforce the contractual provisions. The PCTs have adopted a policy of tolerating this abuse of the principles of the NHS, in disregard of the statutory duty *“to have regard to the NHS Constitution”*.

Practices have adopted 0844 numbers after 1 April 2010, and they continue to do so. No evidence has been produced to support the apparently spurious claim that at least one telephone service provider exceptionally refuses requests to migrate to the equivalent 0344 number. It would only be if such an exceptional and perverse position were taken by a telephone service provider, for no sound commercial reason, that the option of migration would not be a “reasonable step” for a NHS-contracted practice to take.

Correcting this error

The **BBC** has indicated that it is keen to follow up on the local stories.

This message is intended as a briefing to all those who may be involved, so that they may understand the position of the **fair telecoms campaign** on this matter. We look to all those who have a concern (and a duty) to ensure that the principles of the NHS are retained through the on-going reforms to recognise that this issue hits at the heart of those principles, because patients of a practice are paying to meet the costs incurred by the practice in providing its NHS services. Once the issue is recognised and properly understood, we expect long overdue appropriate action to follow swiftly.

Whatever misunderstandings of the terms of the contractual conditions may be used to confuse the issue, and whatever spurious claims may be made by interested parties, the essential issue is unchanged:

We pay for NHS services through taxation, not through fees paid to providers as we access NHS services.

Although the NHS is undergoing radical reform, we await any possible change to this essential principle. This principle is being breached where 084 numbers are being used (Yes – NHS Direct is another example!)

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The **fair telecoms campaign** believes that any practice which has chosen or retained this “illegal” method of funding its NHS services should seek to understand the decision it has made and explain it to its patients. Having done so ...

- it may choose to take advantage of the slackness shown by **NHS Kent and Medway** and argue that it is right for patients, and other callers, to subsidise the costs it incurs,
- if it has good reason to change its telephone system, then this may produce the necessary effect – however, the number migration option means that no such change is essential,
- alternatively; it must make representations to its telephone service provider demanding **immediate migration to the equivalent 0344 number**. (See [notes below](#).)

If we find that a telephone service provider is indeed interfering in the operation of the NHS, by unreasonably refusing such requests, then we will have a new situation to deal with. This must however be brought out into the open.

Both I, and a group of local campaigners, will continue to issue media briefings and comments on this matter. We are however very keen to engage directly with any of those to whom this message is copied; to aid their understanding of the issues, exchange views and provide any support we can to efforts to achieve the swift and proper resolution of the issue that is long overdue.

Please make contact through myself.

regards

David



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Circulation of this message

- Officers of NHS Kent and Medway engaged in the transfer to the NCB LAT
- Officers of local authorities engaged with the development of Health and Wellbeing Boards
- Representative of LINKs and those engaged with the development of HealthWatch
- Officers of Kent LMC
- Contacts for Kent CCGs
- Practices [listed below](#) (where email addresses are published)
- BBC personnel covering this story
- Other local media (some are blind copied)
- MPs with constituents affected
- Local **fair telecoms campaign** supporters

If any omissions are noted, I would be most grateful if a copy could be passed on.

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Notes on requests for migration from 0844 to 0344

There is no valid reason why the telephone service provider should refuse such a request, as a variation to an existing network telephone service supply arrangement, given that the practice is ready to meet the full cost of the system which it selected, for the remainder of the contract period.

Whilst there may be a modest administration charge to cover the process of migration, there is no valid reason for any contract termination penalty to be imposed, because the telephone service arrangement continues and no other aspect of the arrangement is affected in any way. There should be no other one-off cost incurred by the practice, apart from that of advising the change of a single digit in the telephone number.

The additional on-going cost will be due solely to the loss of the subsidy, at the (indirect) expense of patients, from which it has been benefitting - that is the only matter which needs to change.

The revised GP contract refers to the need for the action taken to be "reasonable". Under present arrangements, it must be considered reasonable for a practice to meet the cost of its chosen telephone system in full, rather than benefitting from subsidy at the expense of patients. If a telephone service provider seeks to impose additional unreasonable charges, it must be exposed for this unreasonable deviation from standard industry policy.

Use of a subsidy towards the cost of a telephone system which arrives, via two telephone companies, as a credit against charges that would otherwise be made, is not as simple a charging mechanism as a turnstile at the surgery door, however the effect is essentially the same.

This method of obtaining subsidy also causes additional costs to be incurred, because the call charge premiums paid commonly exceed the amount by which the practice benefits. This opportunity for what some see as profiteering by the telephone companies is opened up by those who choose to themselves take money from their callers.

Furthermore, because the true cost of the system is obscured, the components deployed are commonly found to be far more expensive than would be truly needed to provide the required facilities. This latter point may become apparent when the practice sees the true cost of the system, without subsidy.

Practices may perhaps regret decisions that they made in the past. Wherever any responsibility may be placed, it is not acceptable for NHS patients to continue to suffer the consequences!

List of Practices / Surgeries

The following list, derived from NHS Choices, shows the practices using 084 telephone numbers. In some cases they have been identified as such by NHS Kent and Medway. The latter column refers to the information most recently provided by the Clustered PCT.

PCT	Practice	Practice id	Surgery id	Surgery	Telephone number	PCT information
Eastern & Coastal Kent						
	Dr Ryder J E & Partners	G82066	36062	Northdown Surgery, St Anthonys Way, Cliftonville, Kent CT9 2TR	0844 4773728	Omitted from list
	Dr Grice D J P & Partners	G82060	44188	Northgate Medical Practice, 1 Northgate, Canterbury, Kent CT1 1WL	0844 4778757	Contract said to expire Jan-14
	Dr Cunard A J K & Partner	G82219	41382	St Peter's Surgery, 6 Oaklands Avenue, St Peter's, Broadstairs Kent CT10 2SQ	0844 4770927	Contract said to expire Aug-13
	Whitstable Health Centre	G82071	43748	Harbour Street, Whitstable, Kent CT5 1BZ	0844 4772566	Contract said to expire Jan-13
	Chestfield Medical Centre		40280	Reeves Way, Chestfield, Kent CT5 3QS	0844 4773073	
	Dr R F Cullen Partners	G82007	39241	Church Lane Surgery, New Romney, Kent TN28 8ES	0844 4773385	Contract said to expire Oct-13
			45011	9 Orgarswick Avenue, Dymchurch, Kent TN29 0NX		
	Appledore Surgery	G82186	43574	The Surgery, The Street, Appledore, Ashford Kent TN26 2AE	0844 477 3989	Contract said to expire Dec-13
	Hamstreet Surgery		44719	Hamstreet Surgery, Hamstreet, Ashford, Kent TN26 2NJ		
	Dr A S Pannu & Partners	G82057	38460	St George's Medical Centre, 55 St George's Avenue, Sheerness, Kent ME12 1QU	0844 4773065	Contract expiry unknown
			40065	36 Leysdown Road, Leysdown, Sheerness, Sheppey Kent ME12 4RE	0844 4773083	
			37412	5 Jetty Road, Warden Bay, Leysdown, Sheppey Kent ME12 4PS	0844 4773084	
			40753	62 High Street, Eastchurch, Sheerness, Sheppey Kent ME12 4BN	0844 4773085	
	Wye Surgery	G82142	40959	Wye Surgery, Oxenturn Road, Wye, Ashford Kent TN25 5AY	0844 3878419	084 number adopted after implementation of ban
	Dr Carnegie A M & Partners	G82063	37987	The Market Place Surgery, Cattle Market, Sandwich, Kent CT13 9ET	0844 387 9997	084 number adopted after implementation of ban
			40671	Eastry Surgery, High Street, Eastry, Kent CT13 0HE		084 number adopted after implementation of ban
	Dr Cawdron B A	G82665	37927	Martello Medical Practice, 20 Chapel Road, Dymchurch, Romney Marsh, Kent TN29 0TD	0844 387 7343	084 number adopted after implementation of ban
	Dr Shar M B & Partner	G82726	35860	28 Faversham Road, Seasalter, Whitstable, Kent CT5 4AR	0844 387 8111	084 number adopted after implementation of ban
			43874	32 Saddleton Road, Whitstable, Kent CT5 4JQ	0844 387 8666	084 number adopted after implementation of ban
	Dr Sigurdsson R G & Partners	G82119	37465	The Park Surgery, 116 Kings Road, Herne Bay, Kent CT6 5RE	08443	084 number adopted after implementation of ban
			42623	Herne And Broomfield Surgery, Broomfield Road, Herne Bay, Kent CT6 7LY	879933	084 number adopted after implementation of ban
Medway						
	Dr Huxham C D & Partners	G82753	42993	The Kings Family Practice, 30-34 Magpie Hall Road, Chatham, Kent ME4 5JY	0844 4772496	Contract said to expire Mar-13
			41657	91 Cleave Road, Gillingham, Kent ME7 4AX	0844 4772518	Contract said to expire Mar-13
	Dr Selvan S T & Partner	G82721	40088	119 Long Catlis Road, Parkwood, Rainham, Gillingham Kent ME8 9RR	0844 8151226	Contract said to expire Mar-15
	Dr Raval J K K & Partners	G82161	39875	Walderslade Village Surgery, 62a Robin Hood Lane, Walderslade, Chatham Kent ME5 9LD	0844 4778741	Contract said to expire Dec-15
West Kent						
	Dr Aron U & Partner	G82715	37541	Rowan Tree Surgery, Rowan Tree Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN2 5PX	0844 4772536	Contract said to expire Jun-12
	Dr Chesover D F & Partners	G82083	40206	Thornhills Medical Practice, Larkfield Health Centre, Martin Square Larkfield, Aylesford Kent ME20 6QJ	0844 4773646	Contract said to expire Jun-13
	Dr Patel J R A & Partners	G82809	43381	Istead Rise Surgery, Worcester Close, Istead Rise, Gravesend Kent DA13 9LB	0844 8151333	Contract said to expire Jul-14
			44591	Shorne Village Surgery, Crown Lane, Shorne, Gravesend DA12 3DY		
	Dr Lloyd-Davies S H & Partner	G82754	41713	The Medical Centre, Hadlow Old School, School Lane, Hadlow Kent TN11 0ET	0844 4772442	Contract said to expire Mar-15
	Dr Shimmins C J & Partners	G82006	46160	Pilgrims Way, Dartford DA1 1QY	0844 4778695	Contract said to expire Apr-15
	Aylesford Medical Centre	G82058	44545	Admiral Moore Drive, Royal British Legion, Aylesford, Maidstone Kent ME20 7SE	0844 4778676	Contract said to expire Dec-16
	St Lukes Medical Centre	G82017	41941	St Lukes Medical Centre, 97 Holland Road, Maidstone, Kent ME14 1UN	0844 3878088	Contract said to expire Jun-16
	Dr Fernandes N B & Partners	G82048	37530	Horsman's Place Surgery, Instone Road, Dartford, Kent DA1 2JP	0844 4778789	Contract said to expire May-17
	Ivy Bower Surgery	G82156	39909	7 Ivy Bower Close, London Road, Greenhithe, Kent DA9 9NF	0844 8005499	Contract expiry unknown

List of Practices / Surgeries

To complete correspondence with the list published by NHS Kent and Medway, the following are cases where use of a 084 number has been abandoned prior to contract termination!

<u>PCT</u>	<u>Practice</u>	<u>Practice id</u>	<u>Surgery id</u>	<u>Surgery</u>	<u>Telephone number</u>	<u>PCT information</u>
<u>Eastern & Coastal Kent</u>						
	Charing Medical Partnership	G82094	36298	The Charing Surgery, 1 Surgery Close, Charing, Kent TN27 0AW	01233 714490	Contract said to expire Dec-13
	Dr Kelsey R W & Partners	G82666	43242	Birchington Medical Centre, Minnis Road, Birchington, Kent CT7 9HQ	01843 848818	Contract said to expire Oct-12
	Oaklands Health Centre	G82160	42683	Oaklands Health Centre, Stade Street, Hythe, Kent CT21 6BD	01303 235300	Contract said to expire Apr-13
	The Limes Medical Ct	G82052	42272	The Limes Medical Centre, Trinity Square, Margate, Kent CT9 1QY	01843 222788	Contract expiry unknown
	Dr Wilson P E	G82796	36112	The Albion Road Surgery, 30 Albion Road, St Peters, Broadstairs Kent CT10 2UP	01843 608836	Contract expiry unknown
<u>Medway</u>						
	Dr Maheswaran S & Partner	G82108	37410	52a King George Road, Walderslade, Chatham, Kent ME5 0TT	01634 671037	Contract said to expire Dec-16

Detailed Circulation List

To:

Ann Sutton - Chief Executive - Kent and Medway PCT Cluster; Lynne Stuart - Company Secretary - NHS Kent and Medway; Jayne McDonald - Primary Care Contracts Manager - Eastern and Coastal Kent PCT; 'Lorraine Denoris - Director of Communications and Citizen Engagement - NHS Kent and Medway'; 'Liz Coleman - Head of Customer Services - NHS Kent and Medway'; Andrea Young - Regional Director South of England - NHS Commissioning Board / Chief Operating Officer and Deputy Chief Executive - NHS South of England;

'Councillor Graham Gibbens - Kent Health and Wellbeing Board'; 'Councillor Roger Gough - Chairman - Kent Health and Wellbeing Board'; 'Councillor Nick Chard - Chair - Kent County Council Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee'; 'Tish Gailey - Health Policy Manager - Kent County Council'

Cc:

'John Ashelford - Chairperson - Kent LINK'; 'Lyn Gallimore - Priorities Panel Chair Person - Kent LINK'; 'Tom Maddison - Vice Chairman of the Priorities Panel - Kent LINK'; 'Steph Moir - Lead Kent LINK Support Officer'; 'Heather Wells - Lead Kent LINK Support Officer'; 'Becky Barraclough - Healthwatch Kent LINK Support Officer'; 'Louise Murrell - East Kent LINK Support Officer'; 'Erika Collison - East Kent LINK Support Officer'; 'Cate Boland - Mid to West Kent LINK Support Officer'; 'Sally Brearley - Kent Local HealthWatch Development Group'; 'Councillor David Brake - Medway Local HealthWatch Development Group';

'Dr Stephen Meech - Chairman - Kent LMC'; 'Dr Robert Blundel - Vice-Chairman - Kent LMC'; 'Dr David Grice (Northgate Medical Practice, G82060) - Kent LMC rep'; 'Dr Julian Spinks - Vice-Chairman - Kent LMC'; 'Dr Andrew Parkin (Whitstable Health Centre, G82071) - Kent LMC rep'; 'Dr Allan Fox (Wye Surgery, G82142) - Kent LMC rep'; 'Dr Mehdi Dabestani (Walderslade Medical Practice, G82161) - Kent LMC rep'; 'Dr David Chesover (Thornhills Medical Practice, G82083) - Kent LMC rep'; 'Dr Tariq Hussain (Downs Way Medical Practice, G82809) - Kent LMC rep'; 'Dr Pravin Kasinathan (Dartford East Health Centre, G82006) - Kent LMC rep';

'Dr Navin Kumta - Ashford CCG'; 'Dr Mark Jones - C4 Canterbury CCG'; 'Dr David Woodhead - Dartford, Gravesham & Swanley CCG'; 'Dr Peter Green - Medway CCG'; 'Dr Chee Mah - South Kent Coast CCG'; 'Dr Fiona Armstrong - Swale CCG'; 'Dr Tony Martin - Thanet CCG'; 'Dr Bob Bowes - West Kent CCG';

'Dr Ryder J E & Partners'; 'Dr Grice D J P & Partners'; 'Dr Cunard A J K & Partner'; 'Chestfield Medical Centre'; 'Dr R F Cullen & Partners'; 'Hamstreet Surgery'; 'Dr A S Pannu & Partners'; 'Wye Surgery'; 'Dr Carnegie A M & Partners'; 'Dr Shar M B & Partner'; 'Dr Sigurdsson R G & Partners'; 'Dr Huxham C D & Partners'; 'Dr Raval J K K & Partners'; 'Dr Aron U & Partner'; 'Dr Chesover D F & Partners'; 'Dr Patel J R A & Partners'; 'Dr Lloyd-Davies S H & Partner'; 'Dr Shimmins C J & Partners'; 'Aylesford Medical Centre'; 'St Lukes Medical Centre'; 'Dr Fernandes N B & Partners'; 'Ivy Bower Surgery'; 'Dr Maheswaran S & Partner'; 'Charing Medical Partnership'; 'Dr Kelsey R W & Partners'; 'Oaklands Health Centre'; 'The Limes Medical Ct'; 'Dr Wilson P E';

Rebecca Williams - BBC South East; BBC Radio Kent News; Julia George - BBC Radio Kent;

Kent & Sussex Courier; Kentish Express; Kentish Gazette; News Desk - KOS Media; Glynis Alexander - Editor in Chief - Your Health East / West Kent; Julia Rogers - Editor - Your Health East / West Kent;

Julian Brazier MP; Rehman Chishti MP; Greg Clark MP; Damian Collins MP; Tracey Crouch MP; Charlie Elphicke MP; Roger Gale MP; Helen Grant MP; Damian Green MP; Gordon Henderson MP; Adam Holloway MP; Gareth Johnson MP; Laura Sandys MP; John Stanley MP;

Guy Mayhew; Errol Roberts (WyeWeb); Ann Trigg; Ron Edwards