



## **GP Phone Call Rip-off - rates to increase**

From July of this year new regulations will be introduced to give us a clearer view of the rip-off applied by those who misuse 084 and 087 numbers, to impose an improper charge on callers - see "[Clear Call Rates for Everyone](#)".

At present, the caller's telephone company (except BT, which is uniquely regulated) is free to charge whatever pence per minute rate it wishes, perhaps in addition to a call set-up fee.

Under the new regime, the rate for calls to each number will be fixed to represent the "Service Charge" from which the called person benefits. The caller's telephone company will add an "Access Charge", at the same rate for all calls to all expensive numbers (084, 087, 09, 118).

Ofcom has now published the rates of Service Charge which will be applied to each number range - see "[Service Charge Master Sheet](#)".

### ***GP rip-off rates to increase***

Although use of 084 numbers by NHS GPs in England was prohibited with effect from 1 April 2010, NHS Choices shows that there are still over 200 surgeries using them (a list of cases is available).

The table of new rates shows that almost all of these GPs, through their telephone company, have chosen a rate that is higher than what BT and other landline users are paying at present.

Where it is right for a company to charge for calling them, it is fair for them to charge whatever is an appropriate level. These GPs however represent the worst example where it is wholly wrong.

### ***The rip-off will have to be declared***

Under the new regulations all users of 084, 087, 09 and 118 numbers will have to declare the "Service Charge" - the part of the call cost from which they benefit - alongside their number.

Whilst GPs and others who have been benefitting from Service Charges for many years have been able to give only the lowest possible cost and to disguise the premium, by misleading references to "out of plan" penalty charges imposed on ordinary calls, they will now have to declare it openly.

In the case of NHS GPs, this additional charge for accessing a NHS service has always been improper, since 2010 it has been illegal (in England and Wales), from July it will be visible.

### ***Penalty charges (on non-inclusive calls to ordinary numbers) are exposed***

The new Service Charge levels also serve to highlight the fact that many telephone companies will continue to impose even higher penalty charges on non-inclusive calls to ordinary numbers. This brings home the vital point that **consumers must take care to choose the calling plan that reflects the calls that they make**. Otherwise they could be paying their telephone company more for ordinary calls, than they may have to pay the person they are calling, through a Service Charge.

Whilst some plans (e.g. **BT Unlimited Weekend Calls**) may appear cheap, the additional cost of more inclusive plans (e.g. **BT Unlimited Anytime Calls**) is very quickly overtaken by the penalty charges on very few weekday calls to ordinary numbers.

Noting that economical plans (e.g. **BT Home Phone Saver**) are excluded from lists of packages (see "[BT Phone only packages](#)") suggests that the phone companies are no less keen to rip people off with call charges on ordinary calls than are some users of premium charge numbers.

**Please get in touch for more details on each of these points**

