



### New NHS Premium Rate Telephone Scandal (sold off to profiteering Americans?)

The **fair telecoms campaign** is able to reveal that **Hospedia Limited**, now uses **Premium Rate numbers** for friends and family to call in to patients using its bedside TV and phone service.

It has recently started using 0872 numbers for this purpose. These are classified as being for “**Premium Rate Services**” and are therefore regulated by the **Phone-paid Services Authority**.

Calls to these numbers cost a total of up to **78p per minute** - from **EE** and **Vodafone**. Slightly lesser rates currently apply to calls from other providers (see below).

**Hospedia** provides its services “*at more than 130 NHS sites*”, with 6 NHS Trusts having provided their details for use as “references” - see <https://www.hospedia.com/>.

In 2009, the then Secretary of State for Health prohibited use of expensive telephone numbers for contact with the NHS - see [the directions](#).

It may be a cause of concern to some that provision of bedside telephones in NHS hospitals has been privatised, and is therefore inevitably going to be expensive for patients and their friends and family. **Hospedia**, an American-owned company, does however operate under contract with each NHS trust, and therefore should comply with whatever terms are set in that contract.

## Evasion of the Ofcom prohibition

Previously, **Hospedia** was using 070 numbers for this purpose.

With effect from 1 October 2019, **Ofcom** cut off the opportunity to profit from 070 numbers, as they were widely being used for scams (see [New rules to combat high call costs and scams](#)).

Rather than accepting that its “scam” had been brought to end, **Hospedia** has simply switched to using **Premium Rate numbers**, when no added-value (Premium) service is being offered. It is thereby able to continue its profiteering at the expense of NHS patients, their friends and family.

## Call cost and its declaration

One of the essential features of **Premium Rate Numbers** and their regulation is the requirement to state the call cost in the clearest manner possible.

The charge for calling 084/087/09/118 numbers is made up of two parts.

- £ **The Service Charge** - this is always the same for each number in these ranges, regardless of from where it is called. It is the charge levied by, and to the benefit of, the Service Provider. **Hospedia** has chosen to set a rate of **13p per minute**, including VAT.
- £ **The Access Charge** - this is set, at a single rate, by the caller’s telephone company and applies to all calls to all 084/087/09/118 numbers. A list of the rates is found at [Guide to Calls Costs \(Access Charges\)](#) - **65p per minute** is the maximum.

Users must state the cost of calling as follows - “*Calls cost 13p per minute plus your phone company’s ‘Access Charge’*” - whenever the number is given. This obviously applies to **Hospedia**. The same requirement would undoubtedly also apply to all users of these numbers - **i.e. patients!**

The **fair telecoms campaign** maintains that this is not a valid use of a **Premium Rate Service**. We oppose all use of **Premium Rate numbers** in the NHS, including by American contractors.

