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Counting the cost of calls to hospitals, GPs and businesses using 084 numbers

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HEALTH NEWS

Patient counting cost of phone call to hospital

by Dan Wright
dwright@thekmgroupp.co.uk
@DanWrightKM

A single call to a hospital after an appointment was cancelled cost one man a whopping £7.92.

Geoffrey Crittenden, of Brishing Close, Maidstone, called an 0845 number run on behalf of Maidstone Hospital, and later discovered the charge.

He says the figure doubled his usual monthly phone bill, which is usually around £6 a month, and that the call only lasted 19 minutes.

The caretaker, who works at Sandling Primary School in Ashburnham Road, is hoping for changes to be made to the system.

He only dialled the number when he received a letter informing him a rheumatology appointment for a check-up on his joints had been cancelled.

He said: "I'm incensed by this issue. I was number eight on the waiting list to get through, it took ages, and one call doubled the lot for the month. It needs to be redressed."



Geoffrey Crittenden called the NHS care line and it cost him £7.92

Picture: Martin Apps FM2885755

The 59-year-old said the letter that arrived from the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust gave no warning of high costs.

He added: "It should always say when there are premium rates involved.

"It is totally out of order and I don't expect that from a hospital. "What I'm worried about is

older people phoning up – my mother couldn't afford it, so something needs to be done."

A statement from the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust, which has received complaints about phone prices in the past, said that the charge did seem unusually high. A spokesman added: "The 0845 number is

TRUE VALUE

What Geoffrey Crittenden might have spent his money on instead:

- One prescription at £7.85.
- Sixteen pints of milk, costing 49p on average.
- Four boxes of six eggs - £1.68 each.
- Sending 13 letters first class - with the price of a stamp being 60p.

provided through Virgin Media, at a rate of 3p a minute for people on the Virgin Media network nationwide.

"While this is comparable to a local rate call, the price may vary for other network users.

"The trust has started to phase out its use.

"All of our new appointment letters will shortly contain local 01622 numbers for patient inquiries, in line with NHS good practice to provide local rates for all local calls."

It stated the new numbers will be publicised on recorded messages and on its website.

WHAT IT COSTS



Ron Edwards

The government has pledged a crackdown on premium-rate phone numbers, but this will not come into force until next year.

Currently many retailers, doctors' surgeries, energy providers and banks ask customers to call them using 08 numbers.

0845 numbers may be free for those who have them added to inclusive minutes as part of a package.

But if not expressly included the cost can hit 10p a minute, plus an 11p connection fee, or 14p a minute from mobiles.

Calls to 0844 numbers can cost 5p a minute plus a 15p connection fee from landlines.

Last year determined pensioner Ron Edwards, from Ditton, won his campaign to stop several GP surgeries in Maidstone and Malling using 0844 codes.