



GPs are now free to give up 0844 telephone numbers

The **fair telecoms campaign** has secured an assurance from **Daisy Group** that users of its **Surgery Line** system may **switch from 0844 to 03 (or "01/02 enhanced") numbers on request.**

We are working to support **NHS England** as it prepares to take action against GPs who continue to use 084 numbers in breach of their contracts. [We have listed](#) 938 NHS cases in the UK - 7.6% of the NHS total. [Surgery Line claims](#) 20% of all GPs are using its enhanced telephony system.

Since 1 April 2010, NHS GPs in England and Wales have been subject to a contractual requirement to ensure that patients pay no more than the cost of a call to a geographic number to contact the surgery by telephone. For those with 084 numbers, and committed to a long term arrangement to use a particular telephone system, the obvious solution is to **simply change the number**. 03 and "01/02 enhanced" numbers offer exactly the same technical facilities, but without the "Service Charge" premium paid when calling a 0844 number. (Other NHS providers should do the same!)

This news invalidates claims that GPs cannot comply because they are "**locked into contracts**" (see [this item](#)) or "**face severe financial penalties if they ended their contract early**" (see [this item](#)).

Some GPs have chosen to adopt a single-line local number to run alongside a 084 number. This offers a **two-tier service**, providing better access to those who pay a premium - in contravention of the fundamental principles of the NHS. This silly and improper measure does not even meet the contractual requirement to **ensure** that callers do not pay a premium. It is now wholly worthless.

The **fair telecoms campaign** hopes that, with support from the **BMA** and **Daisy, Surgery Line** users in the NHS will immediately return to compliance with its principles and the terms of their NHS contracts. We will ourselves offer what support we can, including efforts to ensure that NHS GPs complete their migration away from patient-subsidised numbers on the best terms possible.

We sincerely hope that when **NHS England** starts to consider the need for possible formal legal enforcement action, there will be no cases left for it to address. Likewise for the other nations.

Extracts from statements received (please confirm at source, or request copy)

Initial statement from Daisy Group

"Surgery Line customers are NOT forced to continue using 0844 numbers until their long-term contracts end - it is open to them to move to a geographic number on request. Such customers can switch, free of charge, to numbers charged at the geographic rate."

Further clarification from Daisy Group (to avoid possible misinterpretation)

"We are referring to the 030 and 01/02 numbers. We were not referring to the option of a concurrent local rate line to run alongside an 084 number."

Statement from NHS England

"We are linking with the *fair telecoms campaign* to help develop a range of strategies that can be employed by GP practices to enable them to migrate from 084 numbers to alternative arrangements, that don't lose some of the added functionality that some patients value, but which cost no more than dialling a geographically identified number."

"GP practices were required to review existing arrangements by 1 April 2011. This remains the case."

"NHS England was established on 1 April 2013 and as part of our new role we are actively researching the extent of use of 084 numbers and will act upon our findings as and when this work has been carried out."