



**To: Dr Martin Robinson - Oldwell Surgery**  
**Continuing the response to a BBC 'Look North' item**

[Your explanation](#) of the practice's position regarding its continuing use of a 0844 phone number, as [reported by the BBC](#), has been brought to my attention. I circulate and publish this message.

I note the points you make regarding the decision to move to this number. I have heard the same from many of your colleagues, and take no issue with the points you make. I must however urge you to look more closely at the "assurances" you have recently received, to note the points I make below and to reconsider your position. I also ask you not to seek to get your NHS patients involved in this matter, as if it were somehow their responsibility.

- Your NHS contract requires you to ***"take all reasonable steps ... 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"*** - [see 7.4.3. \(b\)](#).

This confirms that it is **your responsibility** to choose a suitable telephone number for universal access to your NHS services, not to present patients with a choice of the quality of service they wish to pay for. Choice in 'our NHS' cannot be based on the price paid for access.

- A **reasonable step** is available to the practice, as confirmed by the following recent statement issued by **Daisy Surgery Line** (see [GPs are now free to give up 0844 telephone numbers](#)):  
***"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."***
- Your explanation acknowledges that the practice is now aware that many callers do indeed **pay more**, having belatedly considered **the arrangement as a whole**. It is therefore required to take the **reasonable step** demanded by the terms of its contract, without further delay.
- Offering a parallel alternative number, which provides inferior access (the engaged tone when another caller has already got through to the switchboard) cannot **ensure** that no patient would take the opportunity to pay more to join a queue.
- You now however seek to confuse the issue, by attempting to discuss issues of relative call cost. If you seriously believe that the penalty charges incurred by the few callers who make "out of bundle" calls to geographic rate numbers are of any relevance to this matter, then I am ready to engage in a suitably detailed discussion, but hope that this will not be necessary.

You actually misrepresent conclusions from the document [NHS Regulations – Supporting GPs with Compliance - Effective January 2013](#); but that is easily done! You should be aware that this document was produced and updated before Daisy Group decided to ***"... not stand in the way of public opinion. ... we have taken the decision to no longer proactively market the 0844 product to NHS-related organisations."*** (see [Surgery Line - Frequently Asked Questions](#)).

Acknowledging that callers prefer not to incur penalty charges on calls to geographic rate numbers is a welcome, but hardly extraordinary, decision! The relevant point has always been the Service Charge incurred by the caller, to the benefit of the person called, when calling any 084 number.

Daisy Group has now withdrawn from pretending that 084 numbers are suitable for the NHS.

**Why do you not do the same?**

**Why do you not take up Daisy's offer?**

