



**Patients empowered to end use of 084 telephone numbers by NHS GPs**

On Monday, NHS England [announced](#) that a letter had been distributed to all NHS GPs who continue to use 084 telephone numbers in breach of the terms of their contracts.

The **fair telecoms campaign** has published [a clear-to-read version of the letter](#).

\*\*\*\*\*

The letter confirms the breach of contract, and in particular it busts some of the myths offered as invalid excuses for a failure to comply. For example:

- All 084 numbers are deemed “expensive”. No 084 number meets the contractual requirement *“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.”*
- Practices who are committed to use “enhanced telephony” features may switch from 084 to geographic rate numbers at any time within the term of their system and network telephone service arrangements, without penalty. The myth of termination penalties is quashed.
- Providing a 084 number as a better service / higher cost alternative in parallel with a standard geographical option, is an unacceptable misrepresentation of what is meant by “choice” in the NHS. The NHS does not offer distinct tiers of service based on ability to pay.

\*\*\*\*\*

The letter concludes:

***“Your Area Team will be in touch to understand your plans for swiftly moving away from the use of 084 numbers.”***

The **fair telecoms campaign** urges aggrieved patients to print out a copy of this letter and present it to the practice. Patients will also be very keen (probably more so) to know of the practice’s plans ***“for swiftly moving away from the use of 084 numbers.”***

\*\*\*\*\*

David Hickson of the fair telecoms campaign said:

***“We campaigned long and hard for the use of 084 numbers to be prohibited in the NHS and this was achieved by the terms of the GP contract revisions introduced in April 2010. Compliance has not however been enforced, and even now the BMA GPC encourages practices to breach the agreed terms of their contract and the principles of the NHS.”***

***“NHS England has now made its position clear and finally published the strong terms of its message to GPs. NHS supporters and patients can help with the communication of this message as they press their concerns on the relevant practices.”***

\*\*\*\*\*

We will be happy to provide details of the practices still using 084 numbers, including those who have adopted them recently - one in the last few weeks!

This is still a very live issue and one that must now be finally resolved for the sake of ‘our NHS’.

