

Fury at health tourists hotline

CASH-strapped hospitals are being forced to spend thousands to call a hotline in a crackdown on health tourists.

Ministers set up the premium 80p-a-minute line which NHS staff can call to find out if a patient is entitled to free treatment.

And they reckon it will help them to claw back £500million a year lost to foreigners illegally using our health care.

The service is an 090 number which is mostly used for adult chat lines, TV competitions and horoscopes.

David Hickson, of the Fair Telecoms Campaign, said: "The idea is wholly disgusting.

"Using a premium-rate line eats into the funding promised to the NHS and is placing an unnecessary cost burden on trusts."

Alp Mehmet, vice-chairman of MigrationWatch UK, said: "If the use of premium lines to access data leads to even some of the costs involved being recovered, it will be a small price to pay."