



**Strictly Embargoed Until 00:01am, 14 September 2009**

## **NEG APPLAUDS OUTCOME OF GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION ON NHS TELEPHONY SERVICES**

### **NHS free to choose 084 numbers for local patients**

Network Europe Group (NEG) today welcomed the outcome of the Department of Health's consultation exercise on "The use of 084 numbers in the NHS". Health Minister Mike O'Brien announced today that the use of 084 numbers would not be banned in the NHS, and that GPs and other NHS professionals and organisations will in future remain free to choose 084 number based solutions for local services. They will be supported by a new framework to ensure that local patients do not pay more than the cost of a local call to contact the NHS.

***Commenting on the Government's announcement, NEG Managing Director, Dean Rayment said today***

“We applaud the Government's decision to allow patients, GPs and other NHS professionals to continue to be offered the opportunity to benefit from the increased services, convenience and choice that are provided by the use of 084 numbers, so long as patients do not pay a premium rate to contact the NHS.

“We were always confident that, once the full facts about NHS telephony services were considered objectively by the Department of Health, the retention of the option to choose 084 numbers would be seen to be the best solution for patients, GPs and the NHS. We congratulate Ministers on their willingness to listen and respond fairly and responsibly to the facts.

“As the market leader in enhanced telephony services for Primary Care - delivering investment of over £25 million into over 1,100 GP surgeries over the past 5 years alone - we appreciate the Government's recognition of the benefits of our solutions. We now look forward to building on our existing successful partnerships with thousands of GPs, other NHS professionals and millions of NHS patients.”



# Surgery Line

NETWORK EUROPE GROUP

## NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The Department of Health announced a consultation exercise on “The use of 084 numbers in the NHS” on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2008. The consultation closed on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009.
2. In its official response to the DH consultation exercise, NEG demonstrated:
  - For virtually all patients' calls, the local GPs' 084 number is not more expensive to call than using an ordinary number;
  - More than 4.5 million patients use an 084 number to contact their GP surgery every month;
  - When allowed to be given the choice, GPs choose 084 numbers because it allows them to improve access and invest in quality services for patients;
  - GPs do not make a single penny of individual profit from 084 numbers.
3. The Department of Health has today announced:
  - The use of phone numbers that charge the public or patients a premium rate to contact the NHS are to be banned in England. The ban will be enforced through proposed changes to the GP contract (in consultation with the British Medical Association's GP Committee), and the issuing of Directions to NHS PCTs and Trusts. These changes will be put in place as soon as practicable.
  - It is not the Government's intention to prohibit 'revenue sharing' as part of its proposals – the important thing is to ensure that patients are not being made to pay more than the equivalent cost of calling an 01 or 02 number. 'Revenue-sharing' arrangements allow for a proportion of the money paid to the supplier to go towards the ongoing cost of running an 084 number, which includes the cost of renting the equipment from the supplier.
  - The proposed action will create a marketplace in which 084 numbers compete alongside 01, 02 and 03 numbers.
  - The NHS Direct telephone advice service currently operates on 0845 4647. However, the Department (with OfCom) are currently consulting on options for the introduction of a new three-digit telephone number to help people find the right local service to meet their urgent, unplanned care needs. NHS Direct will retain its current 084 number until the Government and OfCom are clear about any future role and function they may have in implementing a national 3-digit number for urgent care.

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