



Surgery Line

NETWORK EUROPE GROUP

Staff safety and improved patient access prove critical factors to Isle of Wight Surgery.

Ryde is popular tourist town situated on the north east coast of the Isle of Wight. The town and surrounding area has a population of over 26, 000 – a figure that can almost double during the peak summer months. The Esplanade Surgery, one of four in the immediate locality, has just short of 10,000 registered patients cared for by 7 doctors and 15 other staff.

Popular as a retirement location as well as a holiday destination, the population of Ryde has a higher proportion of elderly residents than the national average. As a result, the practice has a higher than usual number of chronic diseases to treat.

The Esplanade Surgery conducts annual patient surveys as part of their general good practice and commitment to patient care. When the results of these surveys were analysed last year, the issue of engaged phone lines emerged as an ongoing problem that was causing patients frustration and distress. Operating a same day appointment system meant that patients were often struggling to get through during the morning rush. "Our phone lines were engaged for much of the time between 8.30 and 10am and we were already aware of this problem



The town of Ryde on the Isle of Wight is a popular tourist destination in the summer months

due to the feedback from our patients," explains Judy Keith, Practice Manager at The Esplanade Surgery. "When Chris Berry from NEG explained how the Surgery Line system could help us ease the situation, we were very keen to listen."

The surgery was aware that, as their phone communications had been criticised in their most recent patient questionnaire, under NHS guidelines, they could receive additional points if they acted quickly to resolve the problem. Following on from their meeting with Chris, the partners decided to go



The Esplanade Surgery in Ryde, Isle of Wight

ahead with the system and by the end of January 2005, within 2 months of making the decision, Surgery Line System was installed.

In addition to helping address the issues of communication highlighted by the patient questionnaires, Judy was also impressed by a number of the Surgery Line features. Sadly, staff security has become an issue for GP practices nationwide and the Esplanade is no exception. The panic alarm function has been particularly welcome and has played an important part in improving the safety of personnel. The call recording option has also helped to reduce the number of abusive calls that staff have to suffer. NEG claim that simply by announcing that the call is being recorded, most of the abusive calls cease – a theory which has certainly been borne out by the experiences of staff at The Esplanade Surgery.

Initially, after the system was first installed, there were a number of minor teething problems. “One thing I would say to anybody considering installing Surgery Line is to think carefully about the number of options you give callers. Our initial selection went on for too long and our patients, many of whom are elderly, didn’t like this.” With the help of Steve Smith and the Customer Support Team, this and a number of additional small problems were swiftly dealt with. “The NEG support team were marvellous. They helped with every little problem and never made us feel guilty about calling them up,” adds Judy.

Another issue that the practice had to consider during the settling in period was the level of staffing required to manage the queuing facility if it was to actually enhance the service offered to callers. “It’s all very well having calls come through, but patients will just stay stuck in a queue unless we have the staff available to process the calls efficiently,” Judy explains. Fortunately the reporting functions that come as standard with Surgery Line can show if patients are queuing for too long; this facilitates the modification of staffing allocations to the optimum level.

As the improvements to the service become increasingly apparent, more and more patients are now saying that the system is a change for the better. “One patient called us up last week to say ‘welcome to the 21st century!’” comments Judy. She is confident that the positive response from patients will continue to increase as they become more



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familiar with the new system. “I anticipate that the longer the equipment is in use, the more its advantages will be appreciated by both staff and patients.”

The Esplanade’s Top 5 Reasons for choosing Surgery Line

1. Improved staff safety
2. Less verbal abuse from patients
3. A partially self funded system
4. Gaining additional points for acting on patient survey results
5. Eliminating engaged tones.

So how would Judy advise a surgery that was considering switching to Surgery Line? “Don’t give callers too many options, keep things simple. Don’t be afraid to ask the NEG support team for help – they are very knowledgeable and friendly. Surgery Line will provide you with a first class phone system that will enhance the safety of your staff and improve the communications between you and your patients.”

What is Surgery Line?

“Surgery Line is a cost-effective way for forward looking surgeries to improve the service that they offer to patients, reduce stress levels for staff and self-fund a state of the art phone system,” explains NEG’s CEO, Richard Chapman. “As you can see, this case study focuses on one of the hundreds of surgeries that have already switched to Surgery Line. By doing so, they have saved money, improved the service that they offer patients and relieved the pressure on busy staff.”

You and your staff benefit

When a surgery switches to an 084 number, NEG will install and maintain the most efficient communications system on the market. You specify exactly what equipment you want to receive (from handsets to switchboards) for no extra charge. With your own 084 number, you keep about 2p from every call to re-invest in your practice, instead of BT making all the profit from calls to your surgery.

How your patients benefit

Patients benefit by having their calls answered more quickly. The engaged tone becomes rare – even at peak times – because you are able to handle incoming calls more efficiently, whilst patient calls are spread out during the day. Calls to 084 or ‘lo-call’ numbers cost patients 4p per minute, the same as the first minute of BT’s standard call rate between 6am and 6pm. This means that many patients will actually pay less in total because their call is answered and processed more quickly. Significantly, the cost of calls from mobiles remains unchanged – these account for around 30% of all calls to surgeries.

The phone system that won’t test your patients

“I’ve met a number of practice managers who think that Surgery Line sounds almost too good to be true,” says Chapman, “but after it’s been installed, they realise that NEG delivers everything we promise, and more.”

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Case Study No. 27

For more information on how the Surgery Line system can help you visit www.networkeuropegroup.com or call

0800 096 86 26

