



Surgery Line

NETWORK EUROPE GROUP

Southam Surgery finds that Surgery Line delivers everything promised

Southam Surgery is located in the small town of Southam, a few miles east of Warwick, and comes under control of the county's PCT. Serving a semi rural area, the practice has a mix of patients on its register of over 8,000, including many young families as well as commuters attracted by the proximity of the M40.

"We liked the fact that this system offered the facility to filter calls"

The surgery, which employs a total of 17 staff including 5 doctors and 1 registrar, is also a training practice. Much time and effort has been spent on making services as accessible to residents as possible: the website (www.thesouthamsurgery.co.uk) offers patients the option of ordering pre-scriptions online, whilst in autumn 2006, an optional automated check in was introduced. The obvious area to tackle next was the phone service – traditionally an area of frustration for patients all over the country. "With our previous phone system, the line was constantly engaged when patients tried to call us, and this was a situation that we were keen to improve," explains Practice Manager Ann Beadle.



The surgery is located in the small Warwickshire town of Southam, to the east of Warwick

So, having investigated the various options available, the Partners opted for NEG's Surgery Line system, going live in October 2006.

"We liked the fact that the system could filter calls and monitor what was actually coming in and when," comments Ann. "We also felt that using the system would ensure patients did not continuously encounter the engaged tone." Ann was realistic about the fact that there would be



Southam Surgery – it's previous phone system couldn't cope with the call volume at peak times

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some patients who wouldn't welcome the transition. "No one likes change. We weren't sure how our patients would react to the queuing system, and we had some concerns around the issue of charges. However, the system itself and the support from NEG has matched our expectations. Some patients were negative at first, but the positive comments have increased. The reaction from our recent patient group was mixed: whilst some patients don't like the automation, many are enthusiastic about the system now that they have used it."



Patients now find it easier to reach their GP – even in the mornings

Surgery Line has reduced the engaged tone and made it possible for the practice to filter calls, ensuring that patients get through directly to the right person. In addition, Ann has used the reporting facility to identify bottlenecks and has made changes accordingly. "As too many early morning calls were causing problems, we altered the time of our prescription service to avoid the busiest time on reception and this has improved things no end," she explains.

Whilst queuing is still an issue for some patients, the upheaval of the number change ran smoothly and with few hitches although inevitably some fine tuning was required to adapt the system to the surgery's specific needs. "The whole process was made relatively painless by the

professionalism of the NEG team," comments Ann. "We were helped and supported throughout with planning, project management and installation. We have had some technical issues along the way, to do with our out of hours number, but this has been quickly resolved."

Southam Surgery's top five reasons for going ahead with Surgery Line

1. Patients do not constantly get the engaged tone.
2. The use of direct lines for GPs and key staff doesn't block the system. Likewise, the lines are not blocked for GPs who need to phone out.
3. The menu of options ensures calls are put through to the correct personnel.
4. Reports provide useful information on how calls are being processed.
5. The excellent support from NEG throughout.

The staff have also overcome their reservations about the changeover. "Despite initial concerns about changing the telephone system, all the staff are happy with Surgery Line," explains Ann. "The patients sometimes don't listen properly to the options, but the system is easy to use," comments Rose Evans, whilst Receptionist Sue Evans is also enthusiastic about the improvements Surgery Line has brought. "The park facility is brilliant and I really like the hands free set which means I can move around and do other things whilst talking to patients."

So, with a happy staff and satisfied patients, does Ann believe that the switch has been a success? "I am happy to recommend this system to others – in fact I've already done so - another surgery within the area is due to have the system installed shortly. Although it is still quite early days for us, and we have had a few technical issues, the system really does seem to deliver everything it promised!"

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."

Surgery Line

Case Study No. 50

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