



Surgery Line

NETWORK EUROPE GROUP

Surgery Line makes ambitious claims – and lives up to them all

Part of Newcastle PCT, the West Road Medical Centre is an urban practice located in the West End of Newcastle. The centre serves a deprived inner city area with a diverse social and cultural mix of patients, 15% of whom speak a first language other than English. The centre staff includes 5 GPs working with 3 Practice Nurses, alongside 17 attached healthcare professionals, plus the Practice Manager and 12 additional administration staff.

“We have a robust, modern system that completely meets our needs for no additional outlay”

West Road installed the Surgery Line phone system in December 2005 after repeated problems with their previous phone service. “Our old system had only 3 lines which made it difficult to call in or out when the switchboard was busy,” explains Ian Armstrong, Practice Manager at the centre. “Our patients often complained of getting the engaged tone when calling us and we had no information on how the volume of calls broke down over the course of the day.” However, replacing the old system was problematic as Ian explains.



The surgery installed their new system back in December 2005

“Although the system was old, it worked; a new system would have to be funded by the practice. At a time when considerable modernisation was taking place, this would have been financially difficult, so we looked around for a ‘cost neutral’ solution.

We wanted a robust system that would adapt and meet our needs now and in the future. We also wanted a queuing system to keep patients informed, with a menu of options which would help to relieve pressure points on the switchboard and at Reception.”

Ian met with Kath Simons from NEG who explained what Surgery Line could do for the practice. Initially, Ian admits that he



West Road Medical Centre serves patients from the inner city area of Newcastle

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was sceptical of Kath's claims. "I felt that it was simply too good to be true - however, I'm happy to say that it does just what I was told it would. I still can't quite believe that we have a robust, modern system that completely meets our needs for no additional outlay."

Changing a phone number is quite an upheaval and Ian was prepared for some negative reaction from patients during the transition. However, he actually found that the majority of patients liked the system from day one. A few patients felt that the new number was too long (even though it is the same length) and some had reservations about what the costs would be, but other than that, the response has been a positive one.



Patients now find it easier to book an appointment before visiting the practice

Ian himself has no reservations about the decision to switch and feels that Surgery Line has had a major impact upon the day to day running of the centre, bringing numerous benefits. "Now that many calls are diverted to the appropriate department, rather than all coming via Reception, call handling is much more streamlined and efficient. Our patients can also connect to the out of hours service with one phone call as they are automatically routed to our provider. The system has generated reports which allow me to monitor peak call times and divert resources accordingly, improving the quantity and quality of work for us all."

West Road Medical Centre's top five reasons for going ahead with Surgery Line

1. It actually serves the patients' needs!
2. It has modernised the way we work
3. The system is cost neutral to us
– I like to think of it as free!
4. The technical support is of a high standard
5. We are in control of our communications rather than our communications controlling us

NEG come in for praise for the support that they have provided since Surgery Line was installed. "The technical support has been fantastic: any minor problems are sorted out within minutes and we can actually talk to the same engineer if we want to – in fact, many larger telecoms companies could learn a thing or two from NEG."

"The technical support has been fantastic"

If another practice was considering Surgery Line as a solution to their communication problems, Ian would urge them to look into it. "NEG made some ambitious claims about what they could do for our practice without any additional cost. They also claimed to have great technical support and a total package that represented real value for money. Amazingly, they did everything they said they would. As a Practice Manager, sometimes it is easier to leave things as they are – there is less risk of things going wrong that way. But from the installation, to the training, to the ongoing support, I should never have doubted the system for a moment. From my experience, if you are thinking about Surgery Line then go for it! We haven't looked back since."

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. 46

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